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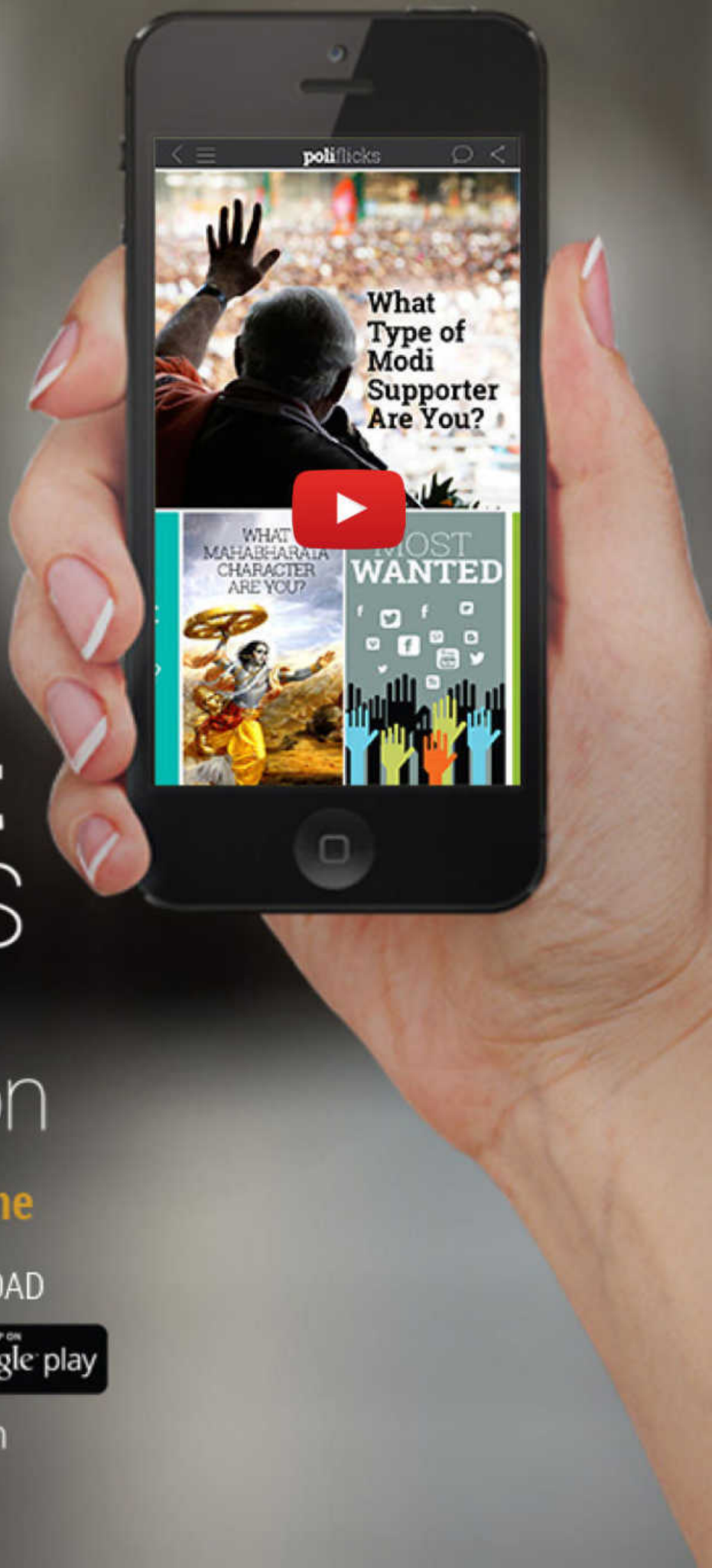


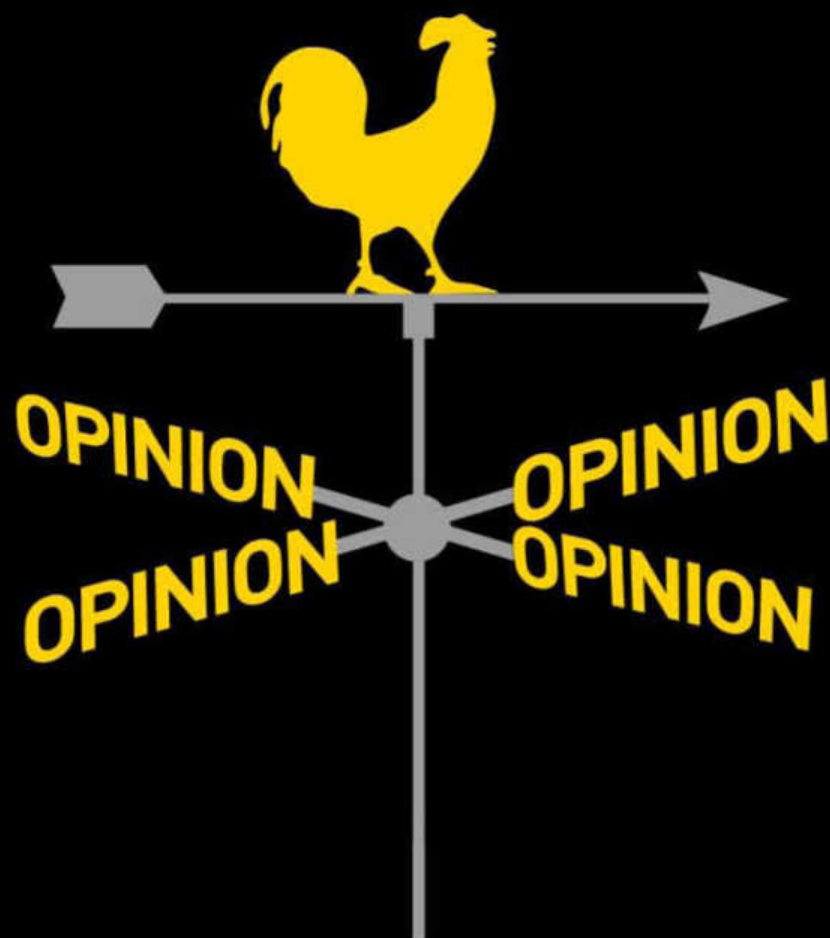
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Volume XLI Number 10; For the week
March 1-7, 2016, published on every Friday

• Editorial Office: Living Media India Ltd., India Today Group Mediaplex, PG-8, Sector-16A, Film City, Noida - 201301; Phone: 0120-4807100
• Subscriptions: For assistance contact Customer Care India Today Group, A-61, Sector-57, Noida (UP)-201301; Phones: Toll-free number: 1800 1800 100 (from BSNL/MTNL lines); (05120) 2479900 from Delhi and Faridabad; (0120) 2479900 from Rest of India (Monday-Friday, 10 a.m.-6 p.m.); Fax: (0120) 4078080; Mumbai: 022-66063411/3412, Kolkata: 033-40525327, Chennai: 044-24303200; e-mail: ircare@indiatoday.com

• Sales: Direct all trade enquiries to General Manager (Sales), Living Media India Limited, B-45, Sector 57, Noida-201301 (UP)

• Regd. Office: K-9 Connaught Circus, New Delhi-110001

• Impact Offices: 1201, 12th Floor, Tower 2 A, One Indiabulls Centre, (Jupiter Mills), S.B. Marg, Lower Parel (West), Mumbai-400013; Phone: 66063355; Fax: 66063226 • E-1, Ground Floor, Videocon Towers, Jhandewalan Extn, New Delhi • Guna Complex, 5th Floor, Main Building, No.443, Anna Salai, Chennai-600018; Phone: 2847 8325 • 201-204 Richmond Towers, 2nd Floor, 12, Richmond Road, Bangalore-560025; Phones: 22212448, 22213037, 22218343; Fax: 22218335; • 52, Jawaharlal Nehru Road, 4th Floor, Kolkata-700071; Phones: 22825398; Fax: 22827254; • 6-3-885/7B, Somajiguda, Hyderabad-500082; Phone: 23401657, 23400479, 23401100, 23402481, 23410982, 23411498; Fax: 23403484 • 39/1045, Karakkatt Road, Kochi 682016; Phones: 2377057, 2377058; Fax: 2377059 • 2/C, "Suryarath Bldg", 2nd Floor, Behind White House, Panchwati, Office C.G. Road, Ahmedabad-380006; Phone: 26560393, 26560929; Fax: 26562593 • Copyright Living Media India Ltd. All rights reserved throughout the world. Reproduction in any manner is prohibited.

Printed and published by Ashish Kumar Bagga on behalf of Living Media India Limited. Printed at Thomson Press India Limited, 18-35 Milestone, Delhi Mathura Road, Faridabad-121007, (Haryana) and at A-9, Industrial Complex, Maraimalai Nagar, District Kancheepuram-603209, (Tamil Nadu). Published at K-9, Connaught Circus, New Delhi-110001. (Editor: Aroon Purie)

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FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Twenty-one months after coming to power on a development plank with the ubiquitous promise of *achhe din*, the Modi government once again finds itself embroiled in a counter productive discussion—this time over nationalism. A government that should be talking about growth, jobs, investment, manufacturing, agriculture, education and healthcare in the days leading up to a crucial Union budget has been diverted by a debate over the Idea of India 68 years after Independence.

India is a secular democracy—these credentials have been established in the Constitution and in numerous legislations and judicial interventions over the decades. One would imagine that the basic question of what is nationalism would have been settled by now. One of the principal qualities of leadership is to focus on important issues which affect people's lives and not allow your energies to be diverted by small incidents. By entering the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) arena—where a battle was raging between two student groups and in a matter that should have been handled at the university level—the government needlessly made a mountain out of a molehill.

There is no doubt that if a group of people is inciting others to violence or to take up arms against the State, it should be clamped down on immediately. But our democracy should be confident enough to take any sort of criticism, and not be reduced to pressing a serious charge like sedition on a group of students with inadequate evidence. The Delhi Police's role in this entire incident has been highly questionable—culminating not once but twice in brazen attacks on journalists in the court premises by a mob of lawyers. A series of revelations over the last few days by India Today TV has also shown that the attacks were pre-planned and that questions can be raised over the tapes used to single out JNU student leader Kanhaiya Kumar and his associates. If there is evidence of links with foreign terrorist groups or with banned Indian organisations, those persons should be dealt with the utmost severity.

Campus politics is a part of student life. That is when you are at your most idealistic, and political parties have always had student wings to recruit those who agree with their ideology. Of late, campus elections have often been fought with the fervour of a general election. The bitter polarisation happening between the major political parties is now reflected in student politics too. The sense is that with a certain government in power, affiliates of the ruling party feel they too can flex their muscles to gain supremacy on the campuses, of course with a little help from the regime. This should not be encouraged.

Our cover package looks at the JNU imbroglio and all the issues that it throws up. We take you inside the campus and examine how an incident that could have been controlled in a swift and efficient manner has blown up into an impassioned national discussion in which both the government and the Opposition are trying to score political points. The students see a larger conspiracy in the government's intervention, coming as it does in the back of the Rohith Vemula suicide in Hyderabad Central University. This does not bode well for the Modi regime. We also discuss how the incident fits in with the RSS agenda of a cultural and educational takeover, and take a closer look at how new divisions across caste, class and religious lines continue to fragment us.

The government seems to be preoccupied once again with the forces of Hindutva, which have brought in their majoritarian agenda disguised under the banner of nationalism. Unfortunately, this is taking the NDA regime away from its core programme. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has often tied the idea of unity to development. He mustn't allow his government to forget it.

(Aroon Purie)



OUR OCTOBER
1990 COVER



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With 'anti-national' JNU leading the battle for the right to dissent, the sedition debate splits India down the middle

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Cover by **ROHIT CHAWLA**
Photograph by GETTY IMAGES

David Headley Testimony

FEBRUARY 22, 2016

How India should deal with Pakistan's terror machine



“India may not be able to make much headway in bringing to justice the 26/11 perpetrators, but Headley's disclosure that New Delhi paid no heed to US intelligence warnings is inexcusable.”

NALINI VIJAYARAGHAVAN, Thiruvananthapuram

Bloke of Revelations

The video deposition of American double agent and Lashkar-e-Taiba operative David Coleman Headley before an Indian court is everything that India has always wanted to hear since 26/11 and everything that Pakistan hasn't wanted to. Apropos your cover story *The Great Headley Chase*, the American agent had already outlined his involvement in the staging of the 2008 attack on Mumbai before US law courts and in his answers to the questions put to him by the National Investigation Agency. But it will be ridiculous to expect this to lead us anywhere because much of this 'evidence' is regarded as inadmissible in Pakistani courts.

J. AKSHAY, Bengaluru

Headley's deposition clearly shows that some in the Indian intelligence establishment may well have been aware of the looming terror attack on



Taking the Lead

It is good to see Rahul Gandhi shed his reticence and play a more active role (*Play the Big Hand*), but he needs to answer a few questions before announcing his support for farmers, the poor or anti-national slo-

gans. The Congress has ruled India for more than 50 years. What has it done for farmers till now? Or the poor? And, lastly, is the Congress now completely incapable of winning any election without allying with regional parties?

SUBRAT KANUNGO, Noida

Rahul claims he is a Kashmiri, a one-quarter one, you elaborate, through his grandmother Indira Gandhi. But what about the other three-fourths?

BHARAT R. SANT, Hyderabad

Mumbai in 2008. The government should take them to task immediately. At the same time, the government of India should not expect much from Pakistan, going by its past experience.

INDU SHANKAR, Varanasi

So Headley has sung like a canary. His revelations may not be new but their timing will certainly help isolate Pakistan diplomatically and in exerting pressure on Islamabad through the US for the extradition of Lashkar founder Hafiz

Saeed. This also amounts to massive evidence against the ISI, which has until now gotten away with its clandestine operations. What is disturbing is that the Nawaz Sharif government has been unable to silence Saeed's anti-India rhetoric (warning of more Pathankot-like attacks), much less prosecute him for his crimes.

J.S. Acharya, Hyderabad

Headley's revelations on the Mumbai terror attack can prove to be of great help to the Indian government in its dealings with Pakistan. Though Pakistan will predictably deny its role, what is also discouraging is that a few secular leaders and intellectuals do not consider Headley's deposition as genuine and believe that he made his statements under pressure. By being more than vocal in their thoughts to the media, all they are managing to do is introduce unnecessary contradictions in the episode.

RAMESH AGARWAL, via e-mail

Playing Safe

The views expressed by former prime minister Manmohan Singh in his interview to your magazine were pretty much on expected lines ("Modi should know that he is PM of all of India"). When he couldn't say anything to the Gandhi family when he was the prime minister, and put up with Rahul Gandhi tearing the ordinance passed by his cabinet, then how can we expect him to say anything against the tactics adopted by the leading party now? What is shocking is that Manmohan Singh acknowledges that there were large-scale scams during his regime but still cannot appreciate the current government for no major scam tainting its rule. While criticising Modi, he needs to come to terms with the fact that, unlike him, the BJP prime minister is an independent decision-maker. He does not have any high command looming over him. MAYA AGARWAL, via e-mail

I must compliment Jyoti Malhotra for asking some relevant questions. The replies, of course, were much in tune with his personality, sober and to the point. However, there was only a brief mention about his role in the last few years of his rule when the country was systemat-



Changing the Game

Apropos your story The New Red Army, the reorganisation of its armed forces is designed to counter threats that China is facing or might face in the future. A single command to tackle India will make deployment easy. The synergy between all branches of the Chinese military will lead to lightning thrusts should they decide to attack India. For India, piecemeal solutions won't do, the government must exercise political will to make our forces fighting fit.

AKSHAY VISWANATHAN,
Thiruvananthapuram

China, in the recent past, has been sending clear signals to India about its new assertive border policy to coerce it into settling the longstanding territorial dispute. China has been rapidly improving its military capability in Tibet and all along the Indian border while India has been slow in creating the requisite defence infrastructure. It is now time for India to fine-tune its military capabilities and improve its overall position in South Asia to counter Chinese moves.

C.V VENUGOPALAN, Kerala

ically looted under his very eyes. I wish there was more on the subject. Unfortunately, Manmohan Singh was more loyal to Sonia Gandhi than to the country. If, instead of toeing Sonia's line, he had justified his helplessness about coalition politics and resigned, he would have earned the respect of the nation and secured his place in the history of the nation.

A.K. LUTHRA, Hyderabad

It would have been a lot better had Dr Mamohan Singh, in addition to his criticism of the working of the Modi government, also used his obvious clout with Sonia Gandhi and Rahul to convince them to adopt a more constructive and objective approach in Rajya Sabha. His 'voice of reason' could still help break the stalemate over crucial economic bills that the government is trying hard to get passed. The GST bill is particularly in everybody's interest and the Congress is opposing it merely to settle scores with the BJP for what they had done during the UPA rule. They are definitely not working in the national interest, which Manmohan Singh can hopefully persuade them to do.

HARSH KALRA, via e-mail



FROM THE
ARCHIVES

The Ideals OF INDIA

It is under an Indian flag that the world is coming to India lately. More importantly, India has become a place where Indians want to be. This new self-belief and confidence in things Indian, and in the country, is felt especially among the young. Within the next decade, the average age of our population will be under 30, and a remarkable four-fifths of these young Indians, a CSDS survey found earlier this year, are optimistic about their future along with their children's. Against expectations, the most aspirational and optimistic youth are to be found not in the big cities, but in the small towns and villages. By a large majority, India's youth subscribe to democratic principles and freedom of expression.

Among young Indians, there is a growing sense that India has to further its entry into the global domain—that self-isolation is not the way forward. No political form or encompassing narrative has yet emerged to draw together these valuable energies of self-worth, commitments to openness, democratic practices—and to hope about the future. Indeed, this nascent national feeling makes some uneasy. But from today's impulses could emerge a very different sense of national honour and the intellectual and political challenge is to help define this new nationalism. Fear is often a spur to nationalism and such was the case with the Hindutva nationalism of the BJP and its parivar. The nationalism of Hindutva was born out of an effort to appease and pander to the sentiments of a minority of Hindus. by Sunil Khilnani

August 2009



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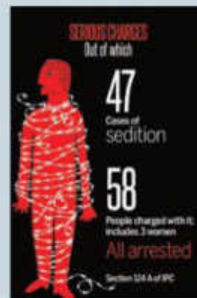
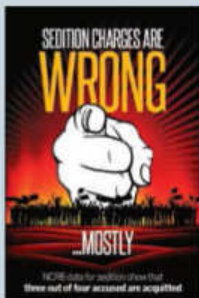
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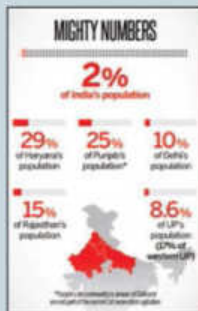
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UP IN HIGH SPIRITS

Kerala and Bihar are marching towards prohibition, but Uttar Pradesh is headed in the opposite direction. Beginning this year, liquor will be cheaper and more freely available in the state. UP chief minister **Akhilesh Yadav** has slashed excise duty on foreign liquor by 25 per cent, a promise he made while campaigning for the 2012 assembly polls. The state's new excise policy will come into effect on April 1. Retail rates will be reduced by 25 per cent, IMFL liquor supply will be increased by 50 per cent and the 26,000 liquor shops will see an increase by 15 per cent. Also in the pipeline are new country-made 'quarter' bottles in the Rs 40-60 range.



Illustration by SAURABH SINGH



GUV ON THE GO

He had done this three years ago. But yet again, when Telangana and Andhra Pradesh governor **E.S.L. Narasimhan** paid a surprise visit on Feb 19 to the state-owned Gandhi Hospital in Secunderabad, he found things much the same: dirty toilets and patients lying on the floor. He made his displeasure evident, making a spot phone call to Telangana health minister **C. Laxma Reddy**.



MISSING IN ACTION

On a rare visit to his Lok Sabha constituency Gurdaspur this week, Bollywood actor **Vinod Khanna** cited "multiple health issues" when taken to task about not being around for his constituents, either after the Pathankot attack in January or the Gurdaspur attack last July. But unforgiving as political rivals are wont to be, former Punjab Congress chief **Pratap Singh Bajwa**, who lost to Khanna in the 2014 polls, could not help but retort that Pakistani fidayeen had visited Gurdaspur more than the sitting MP.



CORBIS

JNU IS NOT TIANANMEN

China may have had Tiananmen in 1989, but its official Xinhua news agency circulated an article on Feb 18 stating that the JNU protests had brought India's "intolerance into focus", its students were "at war with the government" and that "many in India and Indian-controlled Kashmir [as China refers to J&K] believe Afzal Guru was denied a fair trial". While filed by a reporter in Delhi, the Beijing HQ carefully vets Xinhua reports. Incidentally, **President Xi Jinping** visited Xinhua on Feb 19, urging the state media "to promote positive propaganda" of China.



CALLING KISHOR

The Rahul Gandhi brigade—V.M. Sudheeran, V.D. Satheesan et al—in the Congress-led UDF in Kerala has zeroed in on the one man they feel can rescue the party in the upcoming assembly polls. It's man of the moment **Prashant Kishor**, the political strategist who worked magic for Nitish Kumar in Bihar in November. An emissary of CM Oomen Chandy has already held a first round of discussions with Kishor.



CAG ORDER

The Comptroller and Auditor General is likely to propose an audit of the nearly Rs 3 lakh crore non-performing assets of PSU banks after finance minister **Arun Jaitley's** Budget. The CAG believes NPAs are fit for scrutiny because governments capitalise banks via budget funds. The RBI is yet to be approached though the Supreme Court has already asked it to submit a list of the big defaulters.



ON A MODI BEAT

Bihar's ruling JD(U) seems to have assigned its chief spokesman, Sanjay Singh, with a singular agenda: attack BJP leader **Sushilkumar Modi**. Never mind that Modi is neither the Opposition leader in Bihar nor the president of the party state unit. Singh has had something to say on Modi every day ever since the JD(U) and BJP parted ways in 2013.



CALL DROPPER

His political opponents called him call drop minister during the Bihar polls. Now Union telecom minister **Ravishankar Prasad's** own partymen have joined in. The joke in the BJP's 11, Ashoka Road office is that but for call drops, the party could have doubled its membership to 22 crore people.

FREE FOR ALL by Saurabh Singh



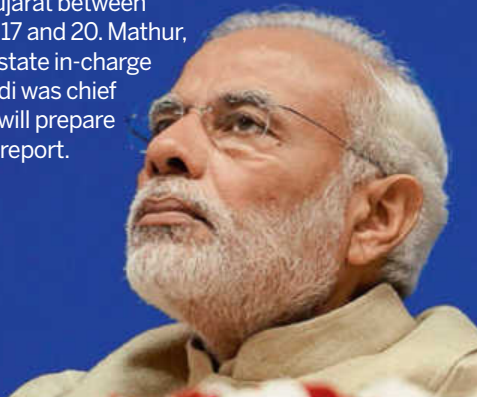
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Saurabh Singh

YASBANT NEGI

MISSING MODI

The BJP's performance in the Gujarat local body elections has Prime Minister **Narendra Modi** worried enough to dispatch a fact-finding mission. The party won urban areas but lost rural Gujarat (it got only six of the 31 district panchayats and 63 of the 230 taluka panchayats), so the PM has deputised Om Prakash Mathur, currently national vice-president and party in-charge of Uttar Pradesh, to visit Gujarat between February 17 and 20. Mathur, who was state in-charge when Modi was chief minister, will prepare a ground report.



DIRECT SPEECH

BJP spokesperson M.J. Akbar was to brief the media on party president **Amit Shah's** February 15 blog attacking Congress vice-president Rahul Gandhi on the JNU row. SMSes were sent to mediapersons. But the plan changed at the last minute and Shah briefed the media himself. It turns out the party president's aides informed him of what happened last April. Union environment minister Prakash Javadekar briefed media on Shah's speech at the party's national executive—and the press attributed the speech to Javadekar.

FUMBLE HARMERS

Both sons of former prime minister H.D. Deve Gowda find themselves embroiled in controversy



H.D. REVANNA

A farmer and JDS activist who committed suicide on February 9 blamed the former revenue minister and JDS MLA for his death in a video recording.



H.D. KUMARASWAMY

Retaliating to unsavoury remarks on her personal life, Congress leader and former MP Ramya on February 19 brought up the subject of his alleged second marriage, to a Kannada star.



with ANSHUMAN TIWARI, AMARNATH K. MENON, ANANTH KRISHNAN, ASHISH MISRA, SANTOSH KUMAR, ASIT JOLLY, JEEMON JACOB, AMITABH SRIVASTAV, ARAVIND GOWDA



IT'S TIME TO TALK TOUGH

Since Independence, while Pakistan's foreign policy has been characterised by unmitigated hostility towards India, the latter has been in defensive mode and shown little inclination, barring in 1971, to impose costs on the former.

Clearly, India's default policy of engagement with Pakistan, spiced on occasion with outright appeasement, has not diminished the latter's hostility towards it. Logic, therefore, demands a change in this policy. A more proactive approach, penalising Pakistan for its export of terror to India, may be more effective. The call for this change in policy also rests on the fact that Pakistan's military-dominated establishment has a vested interest in an adversarial relationship with India. In order to retain power, it has found it expedient to nurture the myth of India being out to destroy Pakistan. It is not surprising, therefore, that anti-Indianism is now a part of Pakistan's DNA. Even if the Kashmir issue was somehow resolved, Pakistan would discover other issues to sour relations.

The case for persisting with India's soft policy towards Pakistan rests on rather specious arguments. For instance, the argument that we have no option but to mend fences since we cannot choose our neighbours is intrinsically flawed as it takes two to do so, and given Pakistan's anti-Indian mindset, no amount of dialogue will help. If our generosity at Shimla and in concluding the Indus Waters Treaty did not help, nothing can. The suggestion that dialogue will redound to India's benefit as it will strengthen the hands of democratic elements in Pakistan is not valid as ultimately the army always calls the shots on Indo-Pak relations. Besides, the perceptions on India of such elements mirror those of the army and their being strengthened is of no great advantage to us. This is borne out by the fact that Kargil and the Mumbai attacks of 1993 and 2008 took place under the watch of civilian governments in Pakistan. Some argue that there is no point in imposing costs on Pakistan as many there believe that India is already doing so. This is a bizarre proposition as the myth of Indian perfidy has been assiduously fostered by the Pakistani establishment which is only too well aware of the reality. The moment India changes tack, the Pakistani establishment will realise that its use of terror is counterproductive as it will cease to be a low-cost option for it.

Some fear that a tougher policy may escalate into a nuclear conflict. Such fears are unwarranted as we can so tailor our policy that it would normally not trigger such a conflict.

Pakistan is, of course, not a normal state and its threshold for use of nuclear weapons is low. But India, too, is a nuclear-armed state and that should be sufficient deterrent.

Finally, it is true that the change in our Pakistan policy will make some countries like the US unhappy, but differences on this issue will be manageable, given our rising clout and our success in projecting Pakistan as a terrorist state. C. Christine Fair, noted US scholar on Pakistan, was prescient when, following the Gurdaspur incident, she said that "failure to respond vigorously will surely encourage further Pakistani adventurist terrorism". Accordingly, she argued that India should "develop a suite of policies that will impose significant and escalating costs upon Pakistan, diplomatically, politically and militarily".

Such a suite of policies should include a vigorous campaign to project Pakistan as a terrorist state and a call for international sanctions against it. For this to carry conviction, high-level dialogue or CBMs would necessarily have to be eschewed, though diplomatic links could be retained at current levels. Concerted efforts should also be made to persuade the US to replace its failed policy of mollycoddling Pakistan with one aimed at penalising it for the export of terror. The Indian community in the US and our defence imports could be leveraged for this.

Pakistan's vulnerabilities in its markets abroad should also be exploited to squeeze its economy. India should also exercise full rights over the Indus waters as legally permitted under the Indus Waters Treaty which would entail maximising its use of these waters and a minimising of their release to Pakistan. We should also call for a renegotiation of the treaty under which we get only 20 per cent of the waters while having 40 per cent of the catchment area.

Like-minded legitimate governments, as in Afghanistan, which also face Pakistan-sponsored terror should be fully supported. India should also ruthlessly exploit Pakistan's faultlines, particularly in Balochistan, Sind and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. Covert action should be undertaken against terrorist elements and their supporters in Pakistan and contingency plans for focused strikes should be kept ready for instant activation following any Pakistan-sponsored terrorist action against us.

These policies must, of course, be accompanied by the urgent implementation of the security reforms mooted under the Vajpayee government, many of which have been languishing, to deter any Pakistani adventurism.

The author is a former deputy NSA.

Illustration by SAURABH SINGH



Anti-Indianism is now part of Pakistan's DNA. Even if Kashmir was somehow resolved, the country would discover other issues to sour relations.



INDIA'S INVISIBLE DROUGHT

TWO YEARS OF CONSECUTIVE DROUGHT, THE FOURTH TIME IN A CENTURY, ARE WEIGHING HEAVY ON THE INDIAN FARMER. THE GOVERNMENT NEEDS TO FOCUS ON THEIR PLIGHT, AND NOW.

FARMERS' SCOURGE



10

STATES HAVE DECLARED DROUGHT SO FAR



302

OF INDIA'S 640 DISTRICTS EXPERIENCED AT LEAST A 20% DECREASE IN RAINS



63%

OF INDIA'S 90 MILLION RURAL HOUSEHOLDS DEPEND ON AGRICULTURE AS THE MAIN SOURCE OF INCOME

BACK TO BACK

This is the fourth time in a century that India has faced two consecutive years of drought*

A LOOK AT THE SUCCESSIVE DROUGHT YEARS

1904 & 1905



* Defined by the Indian Meteorological Department as a deficiency of more than 10% of normal monsoon rains and affecting between 20% and 40% or more of the geographical landmass

FOOD IN THE FIELDS

India's foodgrain production is likely to increase only marginally this year due to drought

253.16 mn tonnes

INDIA'S ESTIMATED PRODUCTION OF FOODGRAIN IN CROP YEAR (JULY-JUNE) 2015-16

0.4%

INCREASE FROM LAST YEAR'S 252.02 MN TONNES



4.5%

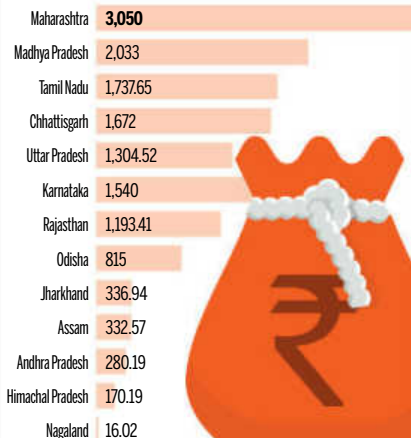
DROP FROM 2013-14



DROUGHT RELIEF

The Centre has announced about Rs 15,000 cr as drought relief assistance to states

FIGURES IN ₹CR



TOO LITTLE?



₹38,000 cr
The total figure demanded by 10 states as assistance

₹15,000 cr
Centre's assistance to states

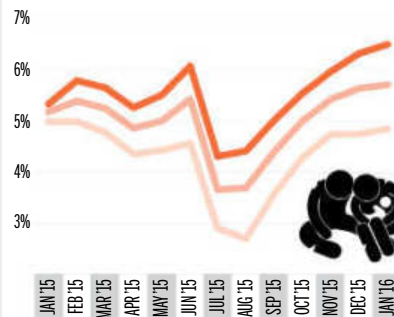


₹2,700 an acre is the maximum compensation for farmers (rain-fed areas) according to Central norms

PRICE RISE HITS HARDER...

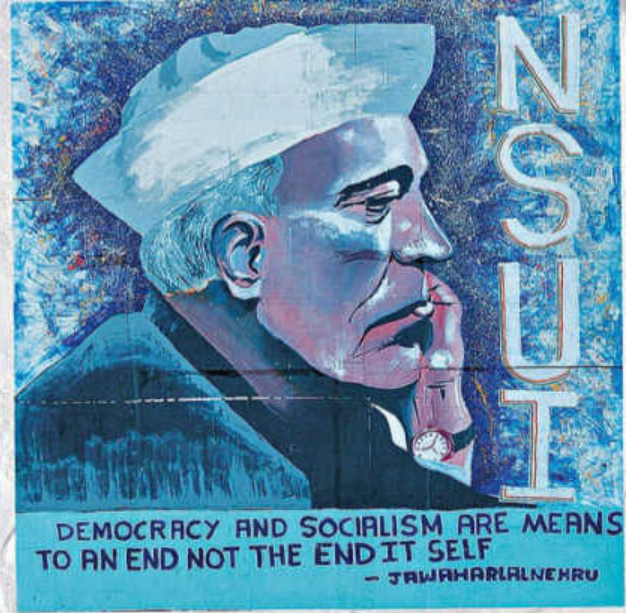
Rural inflation has been consistently higher than urban inflation

CPI YOY (%) RURAL URBAN INDIA



Our farmers are in distress while we are busy debating the right brand ambassadors for drought-free states; time to switch the debate to their plight?





COVER STORY NATIONALISM

Patriot WARS

With 'anti-national' JNU leading the battle for the right to dissent, the sedition debate splits India down the middle

By Kunal Pradhan

On February 21, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, dressed in a white kurta and gilt stole, spoke to a gathering of farmers in the town of Bargarh in western Odisha. In reality, however, Modi was addressing the television cameras that would relay his words to a larger audience across the length and breadth of the country. His message was that black marketeers and disgruntled NGOs with foreign funds were "conspiring" to destabilise his government and defame him. The reference, naturally, was to the imbroglio surrounding the February 12 arrest of Kanhaiya Kumar, student leader of the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in New Delhi on charges of sedition, but the context was left unmentioned.

It was an ironic line of reasoning on several counts. For one, the speech was reminiscent of another address—given on November 11, 1975, on All-India Radio by then prime minister Indira Gandhi in which she had raised the issue of the 'foreign hand' trying to destabilise India.

Illustration by SAURABH SINGH

The F-word had been one of her principal assertions to defend the Emergency imposed earlier that year. Modi's speech was peculiar also because his government has been unable to offer any evidence of a larger conspiracy to destabilise it. On the contrary, a series of conspiracies have come to the fore about the arrest of Kanhaiya, his beating in court by a mob of lawyers while the police looked on, and the tampering of the tape that purportedly proved his sedition.

Revelations this week—most of them by India Today TV—have suggested that Kanhaiya did not participate in chanting slogans about breaking up and dividing India; that the 'Pakistan zindabad' slogan was wrongly attributed to him by a news channel even though what was being said wasn't clear; lawyers have claimed that the Delhi Police supported them while they were manhandling Kanhaiya in court; and the lawyers also claim that they had been given a tacit go-ahead by the police, who did nothing to stop them. Though the Delhi Police have prepared a document in which they contend that they have evidence against Kanhaiya based on TV footage and eyewitness accounts by their own officers and JNU's security personnel, that is still open to scrutiny in court. A charge made by Union home minister Rajnath Singh that JNU students were being backed by Lashkar-e-Taiba founder Hafiz Saeed already appears to be a fallacy that was based on a fake Twitter handle.

At the same time, there is no denying that we are

witnessing a violent clash of ideologies, a division over (what Sunil Khilnani calls) the Idea of India, and a battle of one-upmanship over resurgent patriotism with deep political and social undertones. What began as a minor clash between two student groups in one of India's premier educational institutions has now morphed into a seminal debate that will have deeper implications for the government's mandate, the interpretation of the Constitution, the centrality of the right to dissent, and, most importantly, the freedoms offered in democratic India.

Other questions that will be answered are the role of Hindutva in the Indian State, the definition of nationalism, and the sedition laws under Article 124A of the Indian Penal Code (see *Who is UnIndian*) that are a remnant of the British Raj and continue to be used as a weapon by multiple governments 68 years after Independence. What is a battle of survival for JNU (BJP leader and ideologue Chandan Mitra recently wrote that the government should use the opportunity to shut down the university) also appears to be the gong that has sounded a new patriotic war being waged by the Hindutva right-wing in order to give itself a new political narrative and to push its agenda of a social and cultural takeover, which, to bring up another irony, is at odds with Modi's promise of *sabka saath, sabka vikas* that won him the 2014 Lok Sabha elections.

To examine the battle lines—why they have been

IF SPEAKING AGAINST AFZAL GURU'S EXECUTION IS ANTI-NATIONAL, WHY HAS THE BJP ALLIED WITH PDP? DOES POLITICAL PRAGMATISM TRUMP PATRIOTISM?



JNU STUDENTS PROTESTING AGAINST THE ARREST OF KANHAIYA KUMAR IN NEW DELHI

CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

drawn, who has drawn them, and what the objectives are—it's important to first explore the "scene of the crime".

Revolution in the Air

The Jawaharlal Nehru University, like any large public institution, is a living, breathing organism. Populated by diverse views expressed by people from assorted backgrounds, it experiences multiple emotions, contradictory sensations, and changes myriad shapes—sometimes in the course of a single day. A campus spread over 1,019 acres, its expansive lecture rooms are littered with ideological clashes in the mornings, its graffiti-ridden dhabas are witness to deeply theoretical arguments in the night even as romance and friendships bloom elsewhere in its beflowered gardens. But this institution, which has a history of dissent and a tradition of dialogue, has abandoned its various hues this week. Instead, there is a distinctive whiff in the air and a consistent energy that is almost tangible. Not the whiff of sedition, mind you, but the whiff of revolution.

The university's students' union and its teachers' association have all but declared independence from, to quote Rabindranath Tagore, "narrow domestic walls". Every evening, they gather outside the administration building and discuss the idea of nationalism through lectures and Q&A sessions that are open to the public. With one of their professors standing on a stone courtyard—Gopal Guru delivered the first lecture, South African scholar Ari Sitas the second, G. Arunima the third and Ayesha Kidwai the fourth—JNU is celebrating its "culture of dissent, or the creation of ideas that form the basis of dissent", as social sciences professor Atul Sood describes it. And if the idea is not clear enough, this couplet painted on the stone parapet, *Bol ke lab azaad hain tere/Bol zuban ab tak teri hai* (Speak because your lips are free/Speak because your tongue is still your own), completes the symbolism.

It is this spirit of free discourse that students and teachers of JNU, which has traditionally been dominated by Leftists or Left liberals and even some radicals, allege that the right-wing regime at the Centre and the Sangh parivar are desperate to suppress. They see the fact that the university is facing its biggest crisis just weeks after the Modi government appointed M. Jagadeesh Kumar as its new vice-chancellor as further evidence of a larger game plan. In his speech delivered on the JNU campus on February 10, Kanhaiya, who is pursuing a PhD in African studies, said: "We are of this country and love the soil of India. We fight for those 80 per cent of this country's people who are poor. For us, this is desh bhakti." Two days after his arrest, JNUSU vice-president

“
**If anyone
raises anti-
India slogans,
tries to raise
questions on country's
unity and diversity,
they will not be spared.
Stringent action will be
taken against them.”**



RAJNATH SINGH

Shehla Rashid Shora, an MPhil student, made a more direct assault on the RSS in an impassioned speech delivered without a microphone, calling them traitors who don't respect the national flag or the Constitution. It was a sentiment echoed by Congress president Sonia Gandhi, whose party has not exactly been in JNU's good books over the decades, but whose support has been welcomed because of the immediate crisis at hand. "An organisation (RSS) that never took part in the freedom movement, that never showed any respect to the father of the nation and which never demonstrated any devotion to the national flag is hardly in a position to hand out certificates of patriotism and nationalism," Sonia said on February 22.

The ham-handed and heavy-handed manner in which the Central government has handled the issue, by jumping into a battle between two student groups and by making a serious charge such as sedition seemingly without the evidence to back it, has done it no favours, and the Congress sees this as an opportunity to rally the youth around it.

Five other students—Umar Khalid, Rama Naga, Anirban Bhattacharya, Ashutosh Kumar and Anant Narayan—have also been charged with sedition. Khalid, the lone Muslim, has become the principal target on account of several

pieces of evidence, which, ironically again, seem either circumstantial or too far-fetched. One of the charges against the ultra-Maoist and atheist Khalid, for example, is that he made/received more than 800 calls from Kashmir, the Gulf and Bangladesh over four days in February. This, as Bollywood actress and JNU alumnus Swara Bhaskar pointed out, would translate into nine calls every hour, assuming he didn't sleep at all. "You also managed to abscond while making these relentless calls," she said in a piece addressed to Khalid. "Bro, you are Batman!"

The JNU agitation has united several students' and teachers' associations across the country. Most notable among them is the Hyderabad Central University, where PhD student Rohith Vemula had committed suicide in January saying he was being victimised for being a Dalit. The Hyderabad university and JNU see this clash as a continuation of the same anti-upper class agitation rather than a new battleground. The government's response is that Union HRD minister Smriti Irani has decided that the national flag will be installed in every central university in order to "instil nationalism".

But the fact that is really dividing India is not in dispute. JNU students did speak out on February 9 against the hanging of Afzal Guru, convicted for his role in the 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament. A section of students chanted slogans

in his support, along with other slogans about the autocracy of the Indian State, suggesting he was convicted on circumstantial evidence and hanged wrongly. The hanging was carried out during the UPA regime in 2013. JNU students believe they have the right in a democracy to raise this issue, while the opposing view is that any proclamation in favour of Afzal Guru is in itself “anti-national”. Several BJP leaders and members of civil society have made this contention over the last week, to which JNU professor Kamal Mitra Chenoy counters: “What was said that day was illiberal and it was condemned by students and the faculty, but such strong action against students was uncalled for. If unconstitutional speech is that unacceptable, why wasn’t action taken against Sadhvi Niranjana Jyoti when she passed the discriminatory comment on Ramzaade and Haramzaade (in the run-up to the Delhi elections in 2014)? She was let off with an apology.”

It raises another discomfiting question: if speaking against the executions of Afzal Guru and 1993 Mumbai blasts accused Yakub Memon is indeed being anti-national, why did the BJP form a government in Jammu & Kashmir with the PDP, which has described Afzal Guru as a martyr on numerous occasions? And in Punjab, the BJP’s ally Akali Dal strongly backs former chief minister Beant Singh’s killer Balwant Singh Rajoana, who is hailed as a martyr by the Akal Takht while being on death row. In other words, does political pragmatism trump patriotism?

What the Sangh Wants

Now that this nationalism debate has been handed to the ruling BJP and the RSS on a platter, indications are that they want to run with it. The question, who is anti-national and who isn’t, has the potential to serve multiple purposes. BJP insiders feel that the party, which suffered big reverses in the Delhi and Bihar assembly elections in 2015, has suddenly found a new polarising plank.

There had been indications of a search for a new differentiator for a while, particularly since the two primary narratives on which the NDA came to power—economy and governance—seemed to have been overtaken by issues such as the legislative logjam. While India’s growth numbers are still high, despondency is creeping in due to the slowdown in the agriculture sector, the lack of investment and a tepid job market. The new regime has not been able to fulfil its promise of minimum government, maximum governance, with disinvestment projects still stuck and the country rising much slower than expected in the ease-of-business rankings.

With no dramatic signs of either development or the ubiquitous *achhe din* promise coming to fruition—also because these

are goals that can only be fulfilled over the long term—BJP strategists have longed for a new issue to rally the party’s support base. With Hindutva as its guiding light, issues such as ‘love jihad’, ‘ghar wapasi’ and beef ban—raised over the last 18 months—have not found the kind of resonance the party had hoped they would. The party is equally uncertain about the Ram Mandir issue, which has been put on hold for now and could well be revived close to next year’s assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh.

So, in the absence of a clear point of contention, the nationalism debate has been welcomed with open arms. Not only does anti-national have a greater import than non-Hindu, ideas such as nation, state and government are so complicated and emotional without being religion- or caste-specific that it is easier to build a narrative around them. If you are anti-national, you are pro-Pakistan, and anti-army—it’s a line of reasoning that is easy to run with.

A senior BJP leader says the party is hoping to raise the pitch of the nationalism debate to build public opinion and win votes in Assam and West Bengal, two of the four states where it can make inroads in the upcoming assembly elections. The bigger target is UP—which goes to the polls next year, and which the BJP and its allies had swept by winning 73 out of 80 seats in the Lok Sabha elections. A victory there would mean that India is still very much under the Central government’s control. “We’re working on an ideological level, and nation first is our theory,” Bhupendra Yadav, the BJP national

general secretary who planned the Jan Swabhiman Abhiyan this month, tells INDIA TODAY. Another national secretary, Shrikant Sharma, adds: “We’ll expose the supporters of anti-national activities. We respect freedom of expression but there must be a *laxman-rekha*.”

There is a clear effort, though, to disassociate the prime minister from the chaos. In fact, the way in which the government arrested the students and then failed to provide concrete evidence against them, has raised concerns among some BJP leaders, particularly those close to Modi. They say his inner sanctum, which has been miffed at JNU since its agitation in the aftermath of the 2002 Gujarat riots, wanted a deft strategy. It feels a Left agenda to hit back against the government’s decision to ban a clutch of foreign-funded NGOs must be exposed.

Apart from the poll plan, the other agenda is to control India’s cultural and education sectors, which the RSS has long held, is dominated by Leftists and liberals. The RSS seems to have been given a free hand by the government on this, and appointments of people supporting its agenda at FTII, CBFC and ICHR are examples. It fits in with the RSS’s larger

“
We need a law to ensure that students in colleges and universities do not face discrimination and their voice is not stifled. Our universities are being encroached upon.”



RAHUL GANDHI



KANHAIYA KUMAR
BEING PRODUCED
AT A DELHI COURT

PARVEEN NEGI

KANHAIYA'S ARREST IS A MANIFESTATION OF A VIOLENT CLASH OF IDEOLOGIES, A DIVISION OVER THE IDEA OF INDIA AND ONEUPMANSHIP OVER NEO-NATIONALISM.

goal of a “Hindu Rashtra” and a new “spiritual order” that will rejuvenate the “reservoir of knowledge” that went dry due to the creation of an “artificial culture” over 500 years of Mughal and British rule. Sources in the RSS say they look at the NDA government—with its absolute majority in the Lok Sabha and minus the encumbrances of coalition politics—as the best opportunity to push ahead with this plan. Something they couldn’t do when the NDA was in power between 1998 and 2004, partly because Atal Behari Vajpayee was not as committed to the cause and partly because the numbers were not as emphatic.

The ABVP, the RSS’s student wing, has been emboldened and is out to assert itself in campuses across the country. This was in evidence during the four-year undergraduate programme opposition at Delhi University in 2014, the Vemula incident in Hyderabad and now the imbroglio in JNU. The ABVP also sees the JNU incident as an opportunity to target other pro-Muslim or pro-Left institutions such as the Aligarh Muslim University, Jamia Millia Islamia and Osmania University.

“The three beliefs—Hindu culture, Hindu forefathers and Hindu land—that unite our society will have to be established. This is what the Sangh has been working for. This is the only way that will result in something. This is the time,” RSS sarsanghchalak Mohan Bhagwat had said in a public speech on the occasion of Dussehra last October.

But Sunil Khilnani, in a piece for *INDIA TODAY* in 2009 about

the merits of nationalism, had written, “We shall need to elaborate a nationalism that proceeds by composition, not by imposition; that is inductive and additive, not deductive and subtractive; that abandons the elusive search for essential identitarian criteria (land, ethnicity, religion, blood) and instead reaffirms our foundational political principles.”

Dissent vs Democracy

It is standing against identitarian privileges that has made JNU a target for right-wing intellectuals for several decades. Unlike private schools, JNU gives preference to students who are from lower castes, who are economically disadvantaged, who live far away from campus, and whose parents have not passed high school.

It is, in that sense, a natural equaliser that encourages students for whom education is the only ticket to a brighter tomorrow. The university spends an estimated Rs 2.33 lakh per year on each of its 7,300 students for a total annual expenditure of approximately Rs 163 crore. These students come from all over—Kanhaiya, for example, is from Bihat village in Begusarai, Bihar; his father Jaishankar dropped out of school in Class X and his mother Meena Devi is an anganwadi worker—and they get to participate as equals in academic debates on topics such as nation-building. It is because of JNU’s diverse students that journals and research from the university have explored various regions

“

The Modi gov't seems to be at war with the students of the country. The same youth that made him the PM are standing against him today. ... As I said before, students se panga mat lena.”



ARVIND KEJRIWAL

M ZHAZO

BOTH THE HYDERABAD UNIVERSITY AND JNU SEE THE CLASHES AS A CONTINUATION OF ROHITH VEMULA'S FIGHT.



PROTESTING STUDENTS AT AN RSS OFFICE IN DELHI ON ROHITH VEMULA'S BIRTHDAY ON JANUARY 30

in greater detail, and consistently offered real histories of the problems facing India. Being educated at JNU is not having a discussion with one class of people but a dialogue that stretches across India.

Since a disproportionate number of Indian thinkers, scholars and bureaucrats have been at JNU at some point, its Left-liberal values stand in direct opposition to the right-wing idea of a majoritarian India. From that perspective, to take it down would be akin to cutting the head of the snake.

There can be no denying that the recent Pathankot and Jammu terror attacks suggest that a larger game may be afoot, and that the government cannot be expected to subscribe to an ultra-Left view of a class war against the “privileged”. Nor can it be expected to tolerate slogans about India’s division. But what qualify as anti-India slogans and the intentions behind them should have been considered more carefully and defined better. These loose definitions play a part in a general sense of despair among lower-caste, minority and Left-liberal students, and is leading to a coalescing of politics around identity that is splitting our campuses apart (see *Identity Clash*).

What is also in question is the very idea of dissent in a democracy. As Surajit Mazumdar, professor of economics at JNU, asks, are we to concede that your idea of nationalism is the only idea? And if that idea is that the State must

never be questioned, what then is the idea of democracy? Isn’t a democracy a place where one must have the freedom to question the State? “You are then telling me, in a free country, you’re not actually free,” he asks. “Should our nationalism be one that acknowledges problems and vows to deal with them, or should it be a nationalism that denies problems exist?”

Speaking on the Centrality of the Right to Dissent at the Rajendra Mathur Memorial Lecture organised by the Editors’ Guild of India on February 12, Nobel laureate Amartya Sen raised a similar point. “The silencing of dissent and the generating of fear in the minds of people violate the demands of personal liberty, but also make it very much harder to have a dialogue-based democratic society,” he said. “The problem is not that Indians have turned intolerant. In fact, quite the contrary. We have been too tolerant even of intolerance.”

So, here we are, in the age of Make in India, Digital India and Skill India, debating how Indian we are, who is really Indian, and what makes us un-Indian. In a nation that has somehow stayed together when few people gave it a chance because of divisions over caste, class, religion, region and politics, do we really need another contentious war to tear us apart? And over all things, ironically, patriotism?

with Santosh Kumar, Karishma Goenka and Kaushik Deka

STRENGTHENING “DIGITAL” COMMITMENT



Best Start-up using
Social/Digital Media
DailyO



Best Media Brand of
the Year-Digital
Aaj Tak



Portal of the Year
India Today



Best Mobile App
India Today

India Today Group Digital has been recognised with
multiple prestigious Social Media Awards in four categories held at
The Global Youth Marketing Forum (GYMF) 2016
and hosted by CMO Asia Council.

Identity CLASH

Forget class, it's the coalescing of politics around identity in our campuses that is perhaps dictating the Sangh parivar's response to student movements

By Ajit Kumar Jha

“If one has to succeed in life, if one has to keep pace with the changing times, then the first condition is not to let the student within wilt, never let the student within die.” These were the wise words of advice that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had to offer at the centenary year convocation of the Banaras Hindu University on February 22.

One wishes the prime minister had offered these words of wisdom to the protesting students of the Jawaharlal Nehru University. It would have won their hearts and the whole crisis could have been averted. “Had the PM done so and seen the popular agitation as a sign of youthful exuberance,” says Professor Praveen Jha, chairman of the Centre for Economic Studies and Planning (CESP) at JNU, “this would not have gone on for so long.”

Instead, the entire incident was mishandled from the very beginning, culminating in the arrest of student leader Kanhaiya Kumar on charges of sedition. The video, which initially formed the basis of the charge, has since been revealed to be morphed. Two other students—Umar Khalid and Anirban Bhattacharya—surrendered before the police on February 23. Three others—Ashutosh Kumar, Anant Prakash Narayan and Rama Naga—continue to face sedition charges.

Many in the JNU faculty feel there could be two possible reasons that could explain the mismanagement of the situation. One could be plain ineptitude on the part of administrative staff and the police. The other is that the emerging political polarisation, the hardening of stand by the government, is part of a larger gameplan of the Sangh parivar to exert control over educational institutes.

The NDA government came to power in 2014 with an overwhelming mandate and riding the enormous tide of hope within the middle classes. Most aspiring middle class citizens, disappointed with the incumbent UPA government, voted for Modi in the expectation that

he would bring about an economic transformation. That, unfortunately, has not happened on the scale expected in the last 22 months of NDA rule. To deflect attention from its shortcomings on the economic front, the Modi government has shifted rightwards, according to some JNU professors, courting support of the fringe elements in the Sangh parivar and unleashing a cultural strategy of social polarisation and muscular majoritarianism.

Asked his opinion, Jawaharlal Nehru University Teachers' Association (JNUTA) president Ajay Patnaik says, “The Modi government feels that JNU students are anti-nationals. Students of the University of Hyderabad and Jadavpur University in West Bengal are also branded as anti-nationals. There has been immense political polarisation on the campuses, leading to violence.” The key question is one of “autonomy of the university campus, a desirable goal in any modern democratic society”.

There is a definite pattern of political polarisation if you look at the other leading campuses in the country, be it the Film and Television Institute of India in Pune, which saw a seven-month-long agitation against the appointment of a new director; or the Centre of Social Sciences and Humanities at the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, where the screening of Iffat Fatima's *Khoon Diy Baarav* (On a Trail of Vanished Blood), a film on Kashmir, on January 29, led to proceedings being disrupted and the viewers—both students and faculty—being asked whether or not the screening was tantamount to being anti-national.

For the last one month, the vibrant campus life at JNU has been turned upside down. Enter any signature brick structure, be it the School of Social Sciences, School of International Studies or the School of Languages—and you find yourself in the middle of a poster war: colourful and creative exhortations at entrances, on noticeboards and alongside staircases.

The JNU poster has always been a

“**There is complete polarisation vertically in which the NDA govt by invoking an arbitrary definition of nationalism is creating an environment against Dalits and minorities.”**



KAMAL FARUQUI

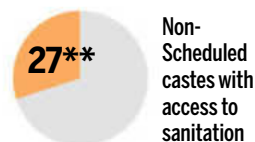
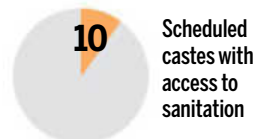
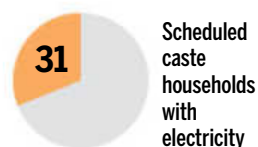
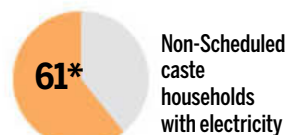


HYDERABAD UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ON A DHARNA AFTER VEMULA'S DEATH

MOHAMMED ALEEMUDDIN

CASTE & CLASS REPORT

CLEANLINESS AND POWER NUMBERS



Source: Census Data 2011

*No. of non-SCs with electricity is double those of SCs with electricity

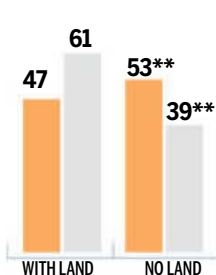
**Non-SCs are three times more likely to have access to sanitation facilities than SCs

LAND OWNERSHIP

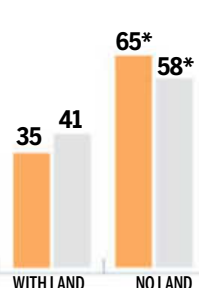
THE PATTERN OF LAND HOLDING AMONG SCs VERSUS GENERAL CATEGORY

SC All

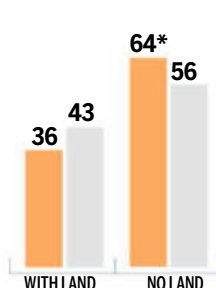
All Rural Households



Rural Labour



Agricultural Labour



SOURCE: GoI *The large percentage of Scheduled Castes (SCs) are employed as landless labourers and do not own any land **Rural SCs with no land are 14% more than general population with no land; all figures in percentage

UMAR KHALID ON THE JNU CAMPUS BEFORE HIS SURRENDER

K. ASIF

A PHD STUDENT OF HISTORY AT JNU, SPECIALISING ON JHARKHAND, UMAR IS A SELF-CONFESSED MARXIST AND AN ATHEIST.

potent weapon of protest, leading the war cry with the progressive poetry of Bertolt Brecht, Pablo Neruda or Hindi radical poet Gorakh Pandey. Come the JNUSU elections, and it gains a fiercer, more radical edge. Calling an opponent “bourgeois” is the worst form of reproach in the JNU intellectual tradition.

Marx and Lenin have long held sway in JNU. Lately, however, they are joined by the likes of Birsu Munda, Jotiba Phule and B.R. Ambedkar. Rohith Vemula and Kanhaiya have recently joined the iconography.

“Release Kanhaiya and save JNU,” screams one poster. “Chalo Delhi, Rohith ka JNU,” reads another. On the campus, there is now demand for a Rohith Act against caste discrimination in educational spaces and a call to punish Union ministers Smriti Irani and Bandaru Dattatreya as also Hyderabad University V-C Appa Rao and a few others.

What makes these two doctoral students the icons of today’s young intrepid generation? Both come from modest backgrounds, one a Dalit and Kanhaiya, 29, a resident of Bihat village of Begusarai district. Both are armed with powerful oratorical skills, and both firmly and fearlessly opposed the ABVP which is on a rapidly expanding membership drive in campuses across the country. Both were targeted by students owing allegiance to the Sangh parivar and paid for it, one with his life, the other with a sedition charge against him.

Caste Meets Class Conflict

In what has been a predominantly Left bastion, icons of caste and identity have ironically started replacing those of class. “Both Rohith and Kanhaiya have inspired a new rainbow coalition of the marginal students: the Dalits, the minorities, the educationally backward castes, the hoi polloi who make it to JNU because of the social deprivation points-based admission process,” says Professor Subodh Malakar, Kanhaiya’s supervisor for his dissertation on Social Transformation in Post-Apartheid South Africa.

The agitations led by students in JNU, Hyderabad University and in campuses across the country is led by “an alliance of all exploited people”, according to Malakar. The crux of this alliance is more cultural than economic.

Is it this coalescing of Left, minority and Dalit organisations around identity then that is fuelling the Sangh parivar’s division of Indians into nationals and anti-nationals, patriots and traitors? Or is it the other way round?

“Religion is a tricky issue,” warns Jha, “therefore, it is too early to wade into such territory...on top of that there is the fear of a majoritarian backlash.” The debate between class and caste has been on for a while, he admits. The Left political parties became aware of being open to identity politics much before the BJP assumed power in the country. “The entire process of identity politics unfolded in the early 1990s, stirred paradoxically by the 1991 liberal economic reforms,” says Jha. Patnaik sees it as a product of the Mandal agitation in north India in the early 1990s.

So is there an alternative political coalition being formed by the marginal communities such as Dalits, the minorities,

the poor farming communities and the blue-collar workers, most of which form the main electoral base of Left political parties anyway? "The emergence of alternative political coalitions is a slow, nebulous process," says Jha. "The Bihar assembly elections in 2015 with its attempts to form an alternative coalition of minorities, Dalits and the backward castes which defeated the BJP resoundingly has become the template for the formation of alternative coalitions in the future. The JNU experience is likely to assist the imagination of new political alliances of the subaltern communities."

| The Minority Report |

Even minority community leaders are being swept into this rising tide. "State tyranny has reached the campuses," says Humra Quraishi, a Kashmiri author. "The NDA government is using every ploy to crush all voices of dissent." What happened at the JNU campus has several layers to it, she says. The Sangh parivar has introduced the politics of violence in the peaceful JNU campus. "Musclemen were seen for the first time in JNU. Goons from Munirka, a private sena, would regularly enter JNU and threaten students. The lawyers who beat up Kanhaiya and the journalists in the courts in front of the police were not professional lawyers but hired musclemen dressed as advocates," she alleges.

"There is complete polarisation vertically in which the NDA government, by invoking an arbitrary definition of nationalism, is creating an environment against certain marginal communities: minorities and Dalits," says Kamal Faruqui, chairman of the Delhi Minorities Commission.

Are the marginalised communities forming a new coalition as a reaction to the Sangh parivar's designs? "Yes," says Faruqui. "There is no insaaf for the Dalits under the NDA regime, the condition of Muslims has gone from bad to worse as is evident from the Sachar Committee report. Therefore, a new alliance of all the communities that face injustice by the NDA must form by 2019."

What are the causes of the convergence of interests between these marginalised groups? "Rohith Vemula brought the minority issue into the spotlight by questioning the charges of sedition levelled against Muslims," says Malakar. "Being a Dalit activist, Rohith managed to tie the two communities together in Hyderabad. It was the alliance between the Dalits and Muslims in the central university campus in Hyderabad that made the ABVP group furious and made them launch an attack on Rohith."

Inspired by Rohith and the Ambedkar Students' Union, Kanhaiya attempted to focus JNUSU's energies towards the creation of such an alliance with the help of the Birsas, Ambedkar, Phule Students' Association (BAPSA), the joint action committee and other formations of marginal communities, says Malakar. Some faculty members at JNU, among them Prof Prabhat Patnaik of CESP, Prof Gopal Guru of the Centre for Political Studies and Malakar himself became the guides of Kanhaiya and other radical students in JNU.

"Circumstances might bring them together," agrees Ajay Patnaik. A CPI member, Patnaik admits that the "Left has lost some ground and needs to stop the decline. One way out is to abandon a mechanical class-oriented analysis in favour of a more real, practical and political approach".

**“
All talk of
Sangh parivar
trying to push
its nationalist agenda
aggressively is bogus.
Our agenda is
nationalism and the
unity of India. We'll fight
anyone who questions
the nation's integrity.”**



SUNIL AMBEKAR

| The Sangh Take |

Sangh parivar activists disagree with the Left ideologues, who they claim have monopolised the JNU debate. The Left disrespect the unity and integrity of India and are therefore anti-national, according to ABVP activists. Says Sunil Ambekar, general secretary of the ABVP, "All talk of Sangh parivar suddenly getting aggressive to push its nationalist agenda is bogus. Our agenda is nationalism and commitment to the unity of India. We'll fight all who try to break the nation's integrity, as we have done in JNU. The police action and lawyers' aggression was a reaction to anti-national acts at JNU. Had JNUSU and JNUTA stopped such anti-India activity, nothing would have happened."

Asmita Singh, who teaches law at the university, says, "JNU should first cleanse itself of anti-India activity, everything else comes second. The whole episode started with the raising of anti-India slogans in support of the Kashmiri struggle. Condemnation and police action is a must in such cases. Anyone who opposes the Left is dubbed as a BJP-RSS supporter in JNU. I have nothing to do with either.

I am a nationalist teacher who believes that the unity and integrity of India is just non-negotiable."

JNU then continues to be the battlefield where the dominant Left ideology is locked in battle with the saffron side. It should, however, be a healthy debate. Any further bungling on the issue is likely to spark off a larger student movement. Today, most students and professors in JNU feel that the Sangh parivar, afraid of such a powerful movement, is unleashing a cultural emergency by waging a war against the students. The need of the hour is to engage with these students. Not take them head-on.

Follow the writer on Twitter @ajitarticle

WHO IS UNINDIAN?

What does it take to be anti-national, legally?

By Damayanti Datta

“It’s simply anti-national.” Delhi police commissioner Bhim Sain Bassi shook his head sombrely, as he spoke to a television interviewer on February 23. “There is an urgent need to expand the scope of the law on sedition. It needs to be rewritten to remove all scope of ambiguity so that citizens have no doubt about what constitutes an anti-national act.”

Who or what is anti-national? That billion dollar question is right now at the centre of the nation’s most dramatic legal moment: on February 9, a group of students from Delhi’s Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) had allegedly raised anti-India slogans to mark the anniversary of the controversial execution of Afzal Guru, an accused in the 2001 terrorist attack on Parliament. On February 13, Kanhaiya Kumar, the JNU students’ union president accused of sedition, was arrested. On February 23, JNU students Umar Khalid and Anirban Bhattacharya, also accused of sedition, ‘surrendered’ before the Delhi Police at midnight. They denied they had done anything wrong and added a telling comment: “These people are telling us about patriotism.”

But the nation is busy spending reams and bites of news commentary to analyse that little statute, Section 124-A of the 156-year-old Indian Penal Code, 1860 (IPC), that defines who or what is un-Indian: “Whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visual representation, or otherwise brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards the government established by law in India, shall be punished.” Considered an “offence against the State”, sedition can even condemn one to a lifetime behind bars.

A Colonial Hangover

“I feel the time has come when we may advantageously concert measures and prepare a policy to exclude effectually seditious agitation.” It was August, 1909. Lord Minto, Viceroy of India, was cooling off at his summer palace in Simla and mulling over “measures to be taken for the suppression of sedition”. The archived Records of the Government of India, Foreign Department Serial No. 178, says he sent out letters to 25 princely states, seeking “mutual co-operation against a common danger”: “disaffected people” who dared criticise the British government in India.

Over a 100 years later, the word ‘sedition’ is still doing the rounds in an elected democracy, where citizens provide



ANTI- AND PRO-KANHAIYA LAWYERS GET INTO A SCUFFLE AT PATIALA COURT, DELHI

SEDITION LAWS IN INDIA A RANGE OF LAWS ON

1 INDIAN PENAL CODE (IPC), 1860 Section 124A, which includes terms like “hatred” and “contempt”, along with “disaffection”

2 CRIMINAL PROCEDURE CODE (CRPC), 1973 Contains Section 95 which gives the govt the right to forfeit material punishable under Section 124A

legitimacy to public policies and laws. A remnant of the age-old English common law, it was introduced by the British in 1870. “As colonial rulers, they felt the need to “criminalise” the disaffection of the colonised towards a government by force,” says legal scholar N.R. Madhava Menon. “But its continuance in free India is incongruous.” In an elected democracy, everyone has the right to disapprove of a government and seek its removal in the next election, without resorting to violence, he explains. The term sedition bumps up against the right to free expression and speech enshrined in the preamble and Article 19(1)(a) of the Indian Constitution.

Chilling Effect

Most modern constitutional democracies around the world have either abolished or let the provisions of sedition fall into disuse. The law of sedition was abolished in the UK in 2009 for not reflecting the values of constitutional democracies. Former colony New Zealand got rid of the law even



M ZHAZO

THE STATUTE BOOKS THAT DEAL WITH SEDITION

3 UNLAWFUL ACTIVITIES (PREVENTION) ACT (UAPA), 1967

For claims of secession, questioning territorial integrity and causing disaffection against India

4 PREVENTION OF SEDITION MEETINGS ACT, 1911

Criminalises meetings likely to promote sedition or disaffection. Continues to be on our statute books.

earlier in 2007, for offending democratic values and becoming a tool to silence political opposition. In the US, the courts consistently criticise the “chilling effect” of the sedition law on free speech and afford wide protection to political speech. Failure to prevent sedition is also punishable there. In Australia, the law remains in the criminal codes of several states. But since 1985, its scope has narrowed and punishments brought down from imprisonment to fines.

In India, however, the vagueness of language, the voluminous legislative history and conflicts in judicial interpretation have allowed successive governments to use it with impunity. Legal search engine Indian Kanoon throws up at least a thousand references for “sedition”. If in the pre-Independence cases, the overwhelming rationale was “undermining the British government in India”, as in the three sedition trials of freedom-fighter Bal Gangadhar Tilak in 1897, 1908 and 1916, in Independent India the judiciary has slapped sedition cases for inciting people to violence. Over

the years, grounds for the sedition charge have widened: “for exceeding the limits of legitimate criticism;” “habitually publishing seditious matter;” “mocking the Constitution;” “offences against the State;” or spreading “hatred,” “contempt,” and “disaffection”.

Yet the judiciary has routinely granted acquittals in sedition cases too. In 1942 (*Niharendu Dutt Majumdar v. King Emperor*), the Calcutta High Court set aside a case where the appellant was arrested for his speech that the government had not taken any steps to stop communal disturbances during the Dhaka riots: “To describe it as an act of sedition is to do it too great an honour.” In 1962, the Supreme Court held (*Kedar Nath Singh v. State of Bihar*), “A citizen has a right to say or write whatever he likes about the government, or its measures, by way of criticism or comment, so long as he does not incite people to violence.” In 1995, (*Balwant Singh and Anr v. State of Punjab*), the Supreme Court refused to punish two men for raising slogans of ‘Khalistan Zindabad’ in a crowded cinema hall the day Indira Gandhi was assassinated: “Raising some slogan only a couple of times by the two lonesome appellants...can not attract punishment.”

Politicos Vs Supremos

Not surprisingly, sedition has turned out to be a great arena of judiciary-executive friction, especially in the new millennium. While the mandate of the courts has been to uphold freedom of speech and expression, successive governments have used sedition laws as a deadly weapon to stifle criticism and gag opponents. If in 2003, VHP activist Pravin Togadia was slapped with sedition by a Congress-run Rajasthan government for defying its ban on tridents, in 2005 the Congress government in Punjab and Haryana filed an FIR against Simranjit Singh Mann, president of the Shiromani Akali Dal-Amritsar, for raising pro-Khalistan slogans in the Golden Temple complex on the 21st anniversary of Operation Blue Star. In 2006, Manoj Shinde, editor of *Surat Saamna*, was charged with sedition for using “abusive words” in an editorial against then chief minister Narendra Modi.

A classic case is physician and rights activist, Dr Binayak Sen, who was convicted of sedition in 2007 on the allegation that he “couriered” Naxalite letters. Did it have anything to do with his vocal criticism of the Chhattisgarh government’s vigilante outfit Salwa Judum? “One of the reasons he got unconditional bail in May 2009 was that they couldn’t provide any evidence,” says wife Ilina Sen. And it was due to former SC justice H.S. Bedi, known for his bold and honest judgements, his outspokenness and compassion, that Dr Sen got bail. Bedi had commented in court: “He may be a sympathiser, but this does not make him guilty of sedition.”

So who will have the last word on the JNU row? The executive or the judiciary? To senior advocate K.T.S. Tulsi, “Youngsters raising slogans and engaging in intellectual radicalism cannot be called sedition.” Where is the evidence to show that they resorted to violence, posed a security threat to the state or had the intention of overthrowing the government, he asks. “I will be surprised if the charges stick.”

Follow the writer on Twitter @DattaDamayanti

Rebel REPORT

A history of some famous Indian sedition cases



1891

THE FIRST TRIAL

Jogendra Chandra Bose criticised the government in an editorial of *Bangobasi* newspaper. Prosecution dropped after he tendered an apology.



1897, 1908, 1916

THREE TRIALS OF BAL GANGADHAR TILAK

Faced sedition charges three times for "undermining the British government in India". Spent six years in jail.

1907

SEDITION OF LALA LAJPAT RAI

Was deported to Mandalay in Burma for "open sedition" without a trial. Was released as protests broke out.

BANDE MATRAM

Aurobindo Ghose was arrested for "habitually publishing seditious matter" in *Bande Matram* newspaper, but was acquitted

ANNIE BESANT V. ADVOCATE GENERAL OF MADRAS

Besant was charged with sedition and her printing press confiscated



1919



TRIAL OF GANDHI

Charged for writing fiery pieces in *Young India*. At the trial, famously said, "Sedition to me is the highest duty of a citizen." Sentenced to six years in jail.

1922

KAMAL KRISHNA SIRCAR V. THE EMPEROR

Charged for condemning Communist Party ban and supporting the govt in Russia. The Calcutta HC commented: "It's absurd to say speeches of this kind amount to sedition."

NIHARENDU DUTT MAJUMDAR V. KING EMPEROR

For his speech that the Bengal government hadn't taken any steps to stop communal disturbances during Dhaka riots. Was later acquitted.

KEDAR NATH SINGH V. STATE OF BIHAR

Was charged for a seditious speech. Supreme Court held: "A citizen has a right to say what he likes about the government, or its measures, by way of criticism, as long as he does not incite violence."

ALAVI V. STATE OF KERALA

Where the court held that sloganeering, criticising Parliament or the judicial setup did not amount to 'sedition'

1934

MANOJ SHINDE, EDITOR, SURAT SAAMNA

For using "abusive words" against chief minister Narendra Modi in an editorial and alleging administrative failure in tackling the Surat floods

SIMRANJIT SINGH MANN CASE

President of the Shiromani Akali Dal, Amritsar, was arrested for raising pro-Khalistan slogans at the Golden Temple on the 21st anniversary of Operation Blue Star. The court held that raising slogans at a public meeting "is not sedition".



1942

PRAVIN TOGADIA, VHP ACTIVIST

Slapped with sedition by Rajasthan govt for defying the prohibitory orders and ban on distribution of tridents, also faced a charge under Section 121-A of IPC (waging war or attempting anti-national activity).



1962

BALWANT SINGH AND ANR VS. STATE OF PUNJAB

They had raised slogans of "Khalistan Zindabad" in a cinema hall the day Indira Gandhi was assassinated. But their conviction was set aside by the Supreme Court.

1982

2006

DR BINAYAK SEN, RAIPUR, CHHATTISGARH

Was convicted allegedly for helping courier messages to Maoist leadership. Was sentenced to life imprisonment and granted bail later.

ARUNDHATI ROY, S.A.R. Geelani, Varavara Rao, Shuddabrata Sengupta et al booked for their "anti-India" speech titled 'Azadi: The Only Way'

2010

2005

ASEEM TRIVEDI

Kanpur cartoonist was arrested for mocking the Constitution. He did not apply for bail until the charge was dropped. The Bombay High Court held: "Expressing criticism of the government with a view to obtaining a change of government by lawful means without any of the above is not seditious."



2003

HARDIK PATEL

The 22-year-old quota agitation leader from Gujarat was booked by the police under charges of allegedly instigating a youth to kill policemen instead of committing suicide.



2015

ARUN JAITLEY

Was charged for an article he wrote on the National Judicial Commission Act case. The Allahabad High Court quashed it and said: "A citizen has a right to say or write what he likes about the govt by way of criticism as long as he does not incite violence."



2016

Outside SUPPORT

As the Indian government continues with its heavy-handed approach to dissent, sympathy pours in from most quarters of the globe for JNU students and professors

| By Jyoti Malhotra |

As *The New York Times*, the well-known liberal US newspaper, accuses Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government for "its lynch mob mentality" and its determination "to silence dissent" in university campuses in India, he must be reminding about the good old days of September 2014 when he and US president Barack Obama jointly wrote an opinion piece in America's other liberal paper, *The Washington Post*, during his visit to the US.

"As nations committed to democracy, liberty, diversity and enterprise, India and the United States are bound by common values and mutual interests..." Modi and Obama said in 2014. A year-and-a-half later, in Delhi on February 22, US ambassador to India Richard Verma pointed out that "universities are laboratories of thought", although he refrained from commenting on the incidents at Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University or Rohith Vemula's suicide earlier at the Central University of Hyderabad.

The ongoing debate over the BJP's hyping of nationalism as the new leitmotif of identity has been resonating across several world capitals. *The Guardian* of UK headlined a piece, 'This is a watershed moment for India', while an editorial in France's *Le Monde* pointed out that "the arrest of a student of JNU and a former professor in Delhi, accused of 'sedition', is the latest illustration of the authoritarian drift of a Hindu nationalist government..." As many as 455 academicians from global universities such as Yale, Columbia, Harvard and Cambridge have issued statements supporting the right of JNU students to dissent.

So far the government is shrugging off the criticism, believing that most foreign governments—including its "natural ally," the US, which is in the throes of election season—will not let their relationships with Delhi be affected by domestic events, however significant these are to the local population.

With the world economy in a tailspin, India continues to be a bright spot, relatively. Though the Sensex

at home continues to fall, as does the rupee against the dollar, the figures tell a different story. Foreign direct investment jumped 114 per cent in December alone to \$4.5 billion. Typically, investors look at six-month periods when they take their decision to invest, keenly watching policy moves to deepen economic reform even at the cost of political pain.

So if the Modi government decides to take path-breaking measures in the coming budget that please investors at home and abroad, the events at JNU and elsewhere which challenge the growing climate of intolerance may simply appear as blips on the radar that can be easily ignored.

For example, the impending visit of UN defence secretary Ashton Carter to Delhi will be closely watched for any announcements in which India will agree to buy more US defence equipment. In fact, the Modi government may well take a leaf out of China's book, where it sturdily faced down critics of its treatment of Tibetans and other minorities in Xinjiang by sweetening the bitter pill with profit.

Of course in China there have been no beef bans. Here,

in Haryana and Maharashtra, foreign investors are upset that they have to watch their food habits. The Japanese, who are especially gung-ho about Modi, privately admit that the beef ban is preventing their countrymen from coming to India in much larger numbers.

Already, some investors are pitching for Indonesia instead. They point to the rising popularity ratings of Indonesian president Joko Widodo, who has charmed the outside world with superior infrastructure, tax amnesty, etc.

Ironically, the most stinging criticism of the Modi government's handling of the standoff at JNU comes from neighbouring Pakistan, where several analysts are invoking Fehmida Riaz's poem, *Tum Bilkul Hum Jaise Nikle* (You turned out to be just like us) arguing that the rise of Hindutva in India is a mirror image of growing Islamic fundamentalism in Pakistan.

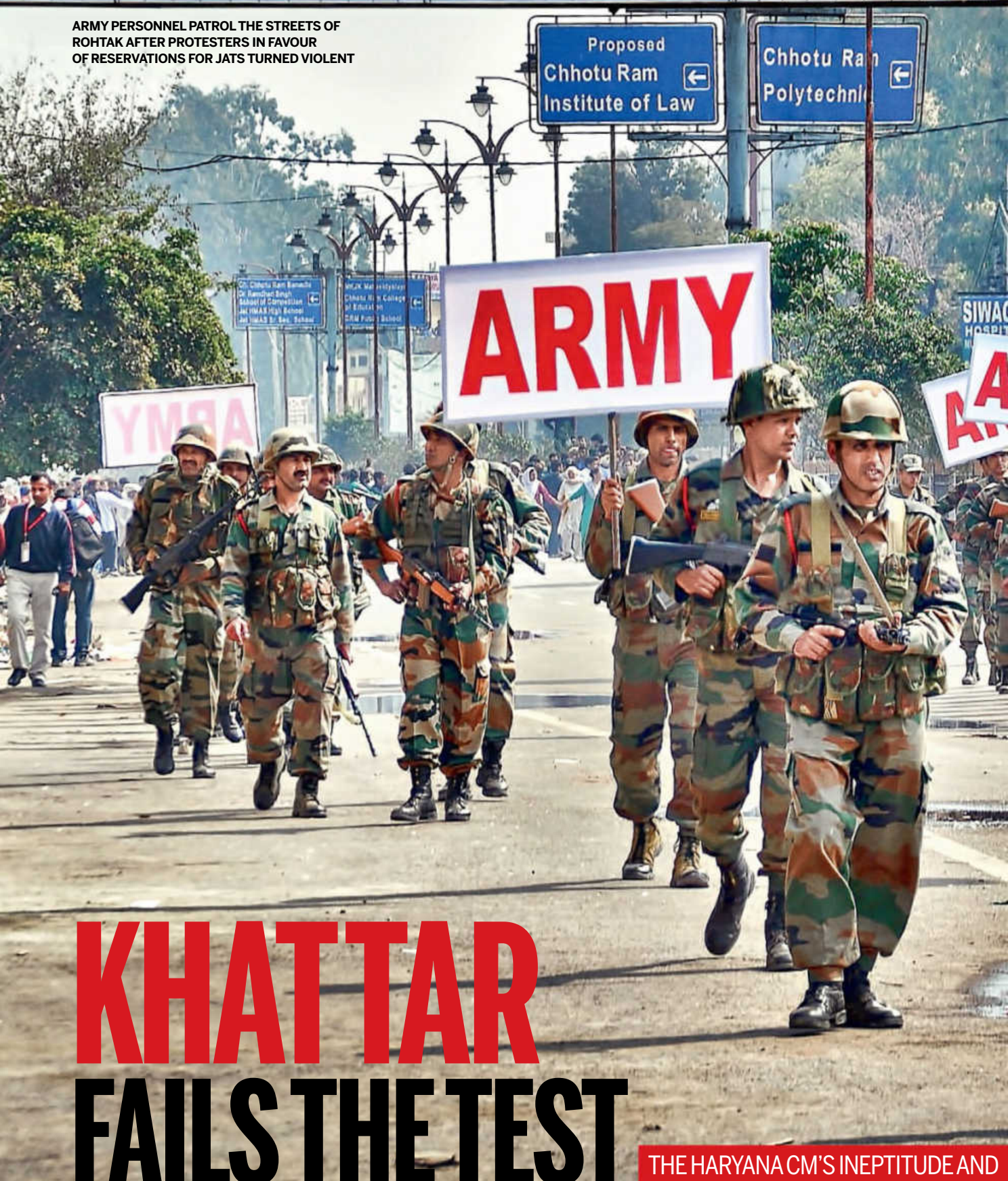
Follow the writer on Twitter @jomalhotra



As many as 455 academicians from universities such as Yale, Columbia, Harvard and Cambridge have issued statements supporting the right of JNU students to dissent.

जाट शिक्षण संस्थायें आपका हार्दिक अभिनन्दन
JAT EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS WELCOME

ARMY PERSONNEL PATROL THE STREETS OF
ROHTAK AFTER PROTESTERS IN FAVOUR
OF RESERVATIONS FOR JATS TURNED VIOLENT



KHATTAR FAILS THE TEST

THE HARYANA CM'S INEPTITUDE AND

करती हैं
ME YOU



THE BIG STORY **HARYANA STIR**

By Asit Jolly

Nineteen people dead at last count; hundreds of vehicles—private cars, police jeeps, cargo-laden trucks, even standing railway rakes—burnt down; scores of public and private buildings, including ministers' homes, still smoking after deliberate arson; fear and an impossible-to-ignore caste divide across the state. This surely cannot be the 'Happening Haryana' that rookie chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar had in mind when he, some say, pompously chose the catchy tagline to sell the state as India's premier investment destination four months ago.

Now, just a week short of the grand Happening Haryana investor summit he promised in Gurgaon on March 7-8, not only is the event in peril, but Khattar's 16-month-old government seems to have come unhinged and in need of handholding from New Delhi. A former RSS pracharak who, despite having no experience of government or the legislature, was appointed CM in October 2014, thanks essentially to his saffron credentials and proximity to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Khattar has been clearly unprepared and completely unsure on how to deal with the first real crisis that confronted his government.

And it is far from being over. The ferocious quota agitation—by far the bloodiest since Haryana's dominant community of Jats first raised the demand for inclusion among backward castes after the implementation of the Mandal Commission recommendations in 1993—is unlikely to ebb and could well bear the potential to derail the Bharatiya Janata Party's only ever independent government in Haryana. Most people, including many of his cabinet colleagues, are blaming Khattar's "ineptitude, dithering indecision and inexplicable reluctance to consult fellow ministers" for the unprecedented situation the state and its people find themselves in.

Even though the quota agitation has been an annual affair around this



DEEPAK KHANNA

A SHARP CASTE DIVIDE CONTRIBUTE TO THE JAT STIR IN THE STATE SPINNING OUT OF CONTROL

time of the year since 2012, with Jat farmers using the respite between the sowing and harvesting of the winter wheat crop to renew their demand, CM Khattar and his coterie of official and political advisors remained completely aloof, concentrating all their attention instead on the upcoming investor summit in Gurgaon. It was only after two fledgling Jat organisations—the Adarsh Jat Mahasabha (AJM) and the Binain Khap—started a dharna outside the district mini secretariat in Narwana on February 8, calling for a Haryana bandh on February 15 and also notifying their intention to lay siege to the state assembly in Chandigarh on February 27, that the state government first stirred.

But even then Khattar and his team, by then including finance minister Captain Abhimanyu Sindhu and agriculture minister Om Prakash Dhankar, the only two Jat ministers in his eight-man cabinet, failed to gauge the scale and severity of the potential crisis. They invited the handful of Jat representatives who were part of the dharna in Narwana for talks in Chandigarh on February 9 but in doing so ended up upsetting the mainstream Jat leadership, which promptly went into agitation mode.

Rejecting the pact AJM and the Binain Khap leaders agreed to on February 9, angry protesters owing allegiance to different factions of the Akhil Bharatiya Jat Aarakshan Sangharsh Samiti (ABJASS) joined in. On February 12, hundreds of Jat protesters, led by Hawa Singh Sanghwan, 69, a former CRPF commandant,



**THE FIRST
NON-JAT CM TO
HEAD HARYANA SINCE
BHAJAN LAL 18 YEARS AGO,
MANOHAR LAL KHATTAR
WAS OBLIVIOUS TO JAT
DISAFFECTION TILL IT BLEW
OUT OF PROPORTION.**

JATS IN NUMBERS

- Jats comprise **26%** of the 2.5 crore population of Haryana, **10%** of the 1.67 crore population in Delhi, **1.7%** of the 19.9 crore in Uttar Pradesh and **0.5%** of the 6.9 crore in Rajasthan
- In Haryana, they occupy **17.82%** of the Class 1 & 2 government jobs
- They have **40%** representation in lower scale jobs and state police...
- ...and **10.35%** representation in educational institutions in the state
- Most of them are farmers owning about **3/4ths** land holdings in the state; average land holding is 2-3 acres

Source: K.C. Gupta Commission report, 2012 & Census 2011



PTI

blocked the railway track at Mayyar in Hisar district; three days on, an even bigger group comprising the most influential khaps of Rohtak district blocked road and rail movement at Sampla.

A few feeble early attempts by Dhankar and Sindhu to engage with the protesters were evidently inadequate. Even after Khattar invited the entire Jat leadership representing various ABJASS factions and all prominent khaps to Chandigarh on February 17 and assured them that his government would legislate on a 10 per cent Special Backward Castes quota for Jats, the agitation only spiralled and transformed into the veritable wildfire it eventually became.

But why did Haryana's ordinarily peaceful Jat protesters turn to such extreme violence? One that resulted in the death of at least 19 people and devastation conservatively pegged at over Rs 20,000 crore. Large sections of virtually every small and big town in the state's Jat heartland—Rohtak, Bhiwani, Jhajjar, Sonipat, Panipat,

Hisar and Jind, including sections along National Highway One—literally burned to the ground.

Sanghwan blames the Khattar government for being far too lackadaisical about the Jats' concerns. "The BJP's Jat leaders, instead of reaching out to their voters and supporters in the districts, withdrew to Chandigarh and Delhi," says the ABJASS leader. He also points to another fact: successive state governments, he says, have been making promises, but never delivering. "This time, the youth, who are the ones actually affected by reservations to other castes, refused to listen to Jat elders. They are even accusing us of harming the cause," he says. The agitation, Sanghwan says, was left leaderless and eventually overtaken by anti-social elements "who really cannot claim any particular caste affiliation".

Most Jat leaders agree that whether by design or simply being his timid self, Khattar refused to rein in Raj Kumar Saini, MP from Kurukshetra and the BJP's OBC face in Haryana.



MEMBERS OF THE
JAT COMMUNITY ON
THE FIRST DAY OF
THEIR PROTEST

HARYANA'S QUOTA QUAGMIRE

- Jats start demanding inclusion in OBCs after the **Mandal Commission Report** in 1990
- In 2012, the Haryana government-appointed K.C. Gupta Commission recommends inclusion of Jats as **special backward castes**
- In 2013, Bhupinder Hooda government accepts report and grants **10%** quota to Jats. This is set aside by the Punjab & Haryana High Court since reservations in the state would have exceeded the SC decreed cap of **50%**.
- In 2014, UPA government includes Jats in **nine states in the central OBC list**; in 2015, Supreme Court quashes this order
- Barring Haryana, Jats in eight other states continue to be included in the **state OBC list**
- In April 2015, NDA government files **review petition** in the Supreme Court. Verdict pending.

Capt Man Singh Dalal, 65, a former Army Medical Corps (AMC) officer who post-retirement heads the 84-village Dalal khap and has been at the forefront of the quota demand, believes it was Saini's incessant and invective-laden verbiage that provoked Jat youth to violence. "CM *ne iski zubaan ko lagaam deni chahiye thi* (The CM should have shut him up)," Dalal says, pointing to the MP's extremely provocative words openly denigrating Jats—questioning their paternity and even provoking them to a street fight on local TV channels. "Jat youngsters were infuriated," he says.

Incredulously, Khattar remained oblivious to the huge storm Saini's offensive pronouncements were kicking up. He remained curiously aloof even when Sindhu and Union rural development minister Birender Singh made apparently retaliatory statements in support of the Jat agitation. On February 14, while the Sanghwan faction was still blockading the railway line at Mayyar, the Union minister, who has never really hidden his

own chief ministerial aspirations or what he thinks of Khattar's "visionless government", defended both the Jat demand for reservation as well as their "*tareeka* (agitational approach)".

It eventually took a direct missive from BJP chief Amit Shah's office in Delhi, in the form of a showcase notice to Saini, to stem the 'nonsense'. Notably, though, Saini, who was back in Delhi for the Parliament session after a sojourn in South India, is still to respond to Shah's notice.

Krishan Swarup Siwach, an old farmer and former Communist Party cardholder from Fatehabad, has keenly followed political and social developments in Haryana since it was carved out of Punjab on November 1, 1966. The violence, he believes, is part of the BJP's larger game plan to polarise voters along caste lines. "Such polarisation would on the one hand help the party consolidate its non-Jat support base in Haryana," he says, "but could also be useful in

drawing OBC votes in Uttar Pradesh in the face of a resurgent Mayawati. Figure it out."

A whopping 72 per cent (34 seats) of the BJP's 47 assembly victories in the October 2014 assembly polls came from north and south Haryana where non-Jat voters—including Punjabis, Baniyas and Brahmins—significantly outnumber Jats. The party had relatively few wins in the central Jat heartland—a fact also amply reflected in the caste make-up of Khattar's council of ministers as well as the party's decision to appoint him, a Punjabi, the chief minister. The infuriated response of the Jats in the present quota agitation is perhaps also consequent to perceptions of 'losing power' in Chandigarh. Khattar, incidentally, is the first non-Jat CM to head the state since Bhajan Lal, 18 years ago. The CM's obvious aloofness to their demands only made matters worse.

That the Jat quota stir in Haryana has disturbingly taken on the hues of a brewing caste conflict can no longer be denied. Though most mainstream

THE QUOTA CONUNDRUM

RESERVATIONS ARE SOUGHT MORE AS A PANACEA FOR RI

By Kaushik Deka

Going purely by data, India's reservation policy demands a review. At first glance, it seems a fair game as 49.5 per cent government jobs and seats in educational institutions are reserved for SCs, STs and OBCs who constitute 61.2 per cent of India's population. But a closer scrutiny explains why the entire debate over reservation, and a contentious one at that, is rooted in the V.P. Singh-led government's decision to extend quotas to OBCs, based on the recommendations of the Mandal Commission.

The biggest reason for the quota rush is the lack of adequate opportunities in the private sector, especially beyond the metros, which makes government jobs highly sought after. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that public sector jobs are shrinking. The total number of public sector jobs has gone down to 17.2 million in 2011 from 19.5 million in 1995.

And now the numbers tell the story of how OBCs threaten to hijack the whole quota pool. Between 2004 and 2013, the share of OBCs in A, B and C grade jobs in the Central government rose to 17.31 per cent from 3.8 per cent. Contrast this with the share of the SC and ST population: between 2003 and 2013, the share of SCs grew to 17.3 per cent from 14.18 per cent; for STs, it grew to 7.59 per cent from 5.01 per cent. While the gross enrolment ratio in higher education in India is 20.4 per cent, it's 31.7 per cent for OBC students. Only 12.5 per cent SC students and 4.2 per cent ST students are enrolled in higher education, according to an HRD ministry survey in 2012.

Of the 61.2 per cent population enjoying quotas, 36 per cent are OBCs, according to the National Sample Survey's 1999-2000 estimates. And the OBCs enjoy 27 per cent quota, as the Mandal Commission estimated their population at 52 per cent.

Reservations for OBCs, introduced in 1993, have often triggered greater controversies than quotas for SCs and STs. From the powerful Marathas in Maharashtra to the influential Patels in Gujarat and the dominant Jats and Gujjars in North India, caste after caste across the country is hankering for quotas, looking at it more as a panacea for rising unemployment rates and a potent weapon to flex their political muscle. "Most of these groups were not actually denied social assets. Many of them

who took pride in farming did not place enough emphasis on educating their wards. What they lacked was an urban connection. With the agrarian economy yielding lower returns, they now want the benefits of reservations in the form of government jobs," says sociologist Dipankar Gupta.

There is an argument that quota should not be caste-based and instead be linked to economic criteria, with the poorest of all castes benefiting from them. Many sociologists reject this idea, as reservation,

THE TOTAL NUMBER OF PUBLIC SECTOR JOBS HAS GONE DOWN TO 17.2 MILLION IN 2011 FROM 19.5 MILLION IN 1995.



RAJEEV GOSWAMI'S
1990 IMMOLATION BID IN
PROTEST AGAINST THE
MANDAL COMMISSION

RIOTS FOR RESERVATIONS Other violent agitations demanding quota

KAPUS in Andhra Pradesh
Leader **Former MLA and MP Mudragada Padmanabham, 63**
In January, the agitators set four train coaches on fire at Tuni railway station in East Godavari district. The Chandrababu Naidu government has set up a commission.

PATIDARS in Gujarat
Leader **Hardik Patel, 22**
In July last year, they started a massive agitation for OBC status. The protest turned violent, nine people were killed, six in police firing, as mobs attacked police stations, government buildings and resorted to arson and stone-pelting.

GUJJARS in Rajasthan
Leader **Lt Col Kirori Singh Bainsla (ret'd), 76**
Between 2008 and 2015, the Gujjar stir claimed nearly 70 lives. Rajasthan government has agreed to provide 5 per cent reservation to Gujjars in Special Backward Classes.

as envisioned in the Constitution, was never a poverty alleviation tool. It was a way of ensuring SCs and STs get social dignity and equality of opportunity, with places reserved in educational institutions, government jobs and even seats in Parliament and state assemblies. The Constitution proposed the reservation policy for a decade and subsequently a review to examine the progress under it but it has been renewed every decade since. According to Manoj Jha, head of the department of social work, University of Delhi, who also doubles up as RJD national spokesperson, it was a tool to provide social equality in terms of representation after the Constitution had guaranteed political equality with universal adult franchise. The growing instances of hate crimes against Dalits—on February 5, a 16-year-old Dalit boy was assaulted in his Madurai school for allegedly sitting cross-legged; on October 1 last year, in a government school in Jodhpur, a teacher thrashed a Dalit student for touching plates being used to serve mid-day meals—have raised a big question: did reservation achieve the goal of social inclusion?

There is little doubt that the first step towards fixing this quota quandary is a review of the Mandal Commission's criteria of identifying backward classes. The commission adopted 11 criteria, which could be grouped under three major heads—social, educational and economic—to identify OBCs. Separate weightage was given to indicators in each group. All social indicators were given a weightage of three points each, educational two points each and economic one point each. The total score was 22 points and any caste with a score of 11 was considered OBC.

Gupta says this “flawed” system of weightage allowed several underserving communities to sneak into the OBC category. For instance, the

first criterion is if the caste is considered backward by others. “In our country, every caste thinks that the other is inferior. So it's easy for any caste to fulfil this criterion and get three points,” says Gupta. The second criterion is if the caste depends on manual labour. In an agrarian country like India, it's easy for most castes to qualify on this score too.

Jha, however, differs and claims that the Mandal report is a scientific document. “Top institutes such as the Tata Institute of Social Sciences were involved in it. The Constitution doesn't mention economic criteria for backwardness, yet Mandal included economic criteria,” he says.

Social scientists Satish Deshpande and Yogendra Yadav have suggested that several other categories, and not just caste, should form the basis for reservations. Apart from caste, community and sex, factors such as family background (managerial, professional, clerical, non-income-tax-paying) and the type of school a person went to (government or private, English or vernacular medium, residential) should also be considered.

Gupta comes up with a rather radical formula to make quotas look more acceptable. “Once a person moves up on the socio-economic ladder taking benefits of reservation and reaches a point where he or she is an income-tax payee, his or her children should be taken off the net of reservation,” he says. A variant of Gupta's idea is already at work in the form of the creamy layer concept, which was introduced by the Supreme Court for OBC reservation to ensure that the wealthier among them did not corner the benefits. In 1993, it was determined that children of parents having an annual income of Rs 1 lakh and over would not qualify for reservation benefits. It was subsequently revised over the years and is now pegged at Rs 6 lakh.

Follow the writer on Twitter @KDscribble

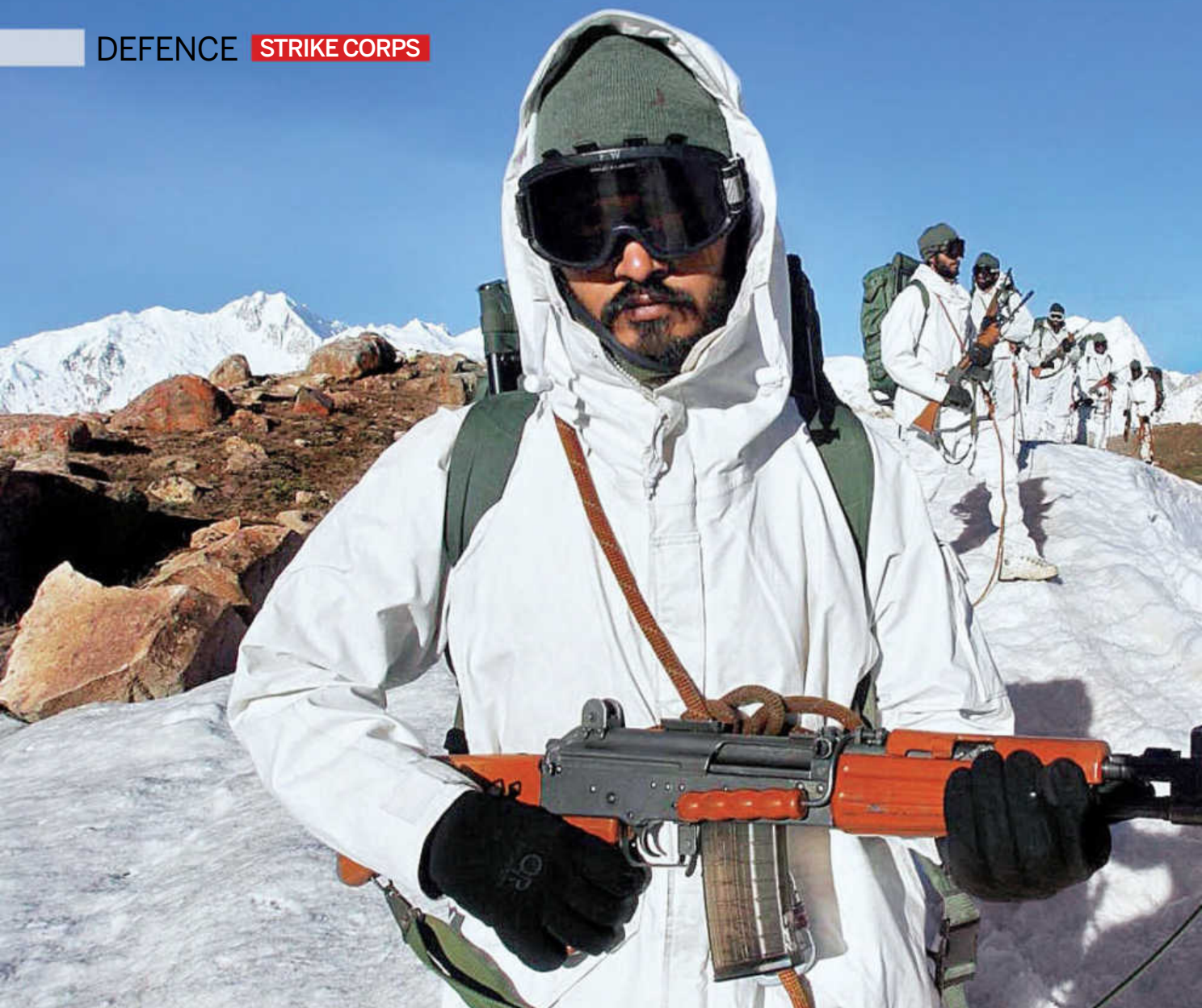
media, both newspapers and network television, have rather responsibly played down spot reports of clashes between the Jats and members of the OBC community, the local press and TV, through February 20 to 22, reported several incidents—Jat protesters specifically targeting non-Jat establishments in Rohtak as well as retaliatory attacks on Jat-owned premises in Bhiwani and elsewhere.

The reality of the caste divide was equally writ in the Haryana police's timid response to the rampaging rioters as they blatantly went about vandalising and torching everything in sight. Reports abound of Jat protesters, clearly secure in the knowledge that the cops would not act against them, methodically going about raising blockades, even employing excavators to dig deep trenches across arterial highways. Notably, the mid-rung and constabulary of the Haryana police are dominated by Jats and they were predictably reluctant to go up against their brethren. By the time the Indian army columns were requisitioned, they had no access to most of the trouble spots. Armed with ‘shoot at sight’ orders in Rohtak, Jhajjar and Bhiwani, army personnel actually carried placards to identify themselves to rioters who had grown accustomed to more benign policemen.

Khattar and his administration evidently failed to anticipate any of this. Into its ninth consecutive day on February 23, the protesting Jats appeared to be relenting. This after assurances from Union home minister Rajnath Singh and the constitution of a high-level committee by the BJP high command under Urban development minister Venkaiah Naidu to find a way out of the quota conundrum.

The Centre's intervention, followed by the Haryana government's subsequent proclamation on legislating to extend reservations to the community, seems to have temporarily appeased the incensed Jats. But the BJP and its CM may have ended up blowing the lid off a Pandora's box of impossible-to-predict consequences.

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THE MOUNTAIN IS NOW A M

The government pares down its ambitious Mountain Strike Corps meant to capture Chinese territory

By Sandeep Unnithan

Last December, Prime Minister Narendra Modi triggered off a bout of anxiety within the Indian army. “At a time when the major powers are reducing their forces and relying more on technology, we are still constantly seeking to expand the size of our forces,” he said, addressing the

Combined Commanders’ Conference, a crucial once-a-year gathering of commanders from the three services, onboard the aircraft carrier *INS Vikramaditya*. “Modernisation and expansion of forces, both at the same time, is a difficult and unnecessary goal.” The PM’s reference was to the army, which had been raising a new mountain strike corps (MSC) comprising 90,000 soldiers since 2014.

In 2013, the UPA had sanctioned the corps—an offensive formation meant to cross the Himalayas and capture Chinese territory on the Tibetan plateau in the event of a border war—but did not allot the Rs 64,000 crore required to get it off the ground. The army equipped the new formations from their War Wastage Reserves in the hope of enhanced budgetary support at a later date.

INDIAN SOLDIERS OUT ON PATROL
AT THE FORWARD LOGISTICS BASE
ABOVE THE SIACHEN GLACIER



PRASHANT PANJIAR

OLEHILL

story in the event of a border war

On January 13, less than a month after the PM's speech, army chief General Dalbir Singh told the media that the strike corps was on course and would be raised by 2021. The truth is somewhat different. The 17 Corps—India's Fourth Strike Corps, in addition to the three Corps that face Pakistan, temporarily headquartered in Ranchi, Jharkhand, is far from being on course.

The 59 Mountain Division with 16,000 soldiers has already been raised in Panagarh, West Bengal, but the proposed 72 Mountain Division in Pathankot has been stalled. One general terms the 17 Corps as “defunct” since it has just one division as against a minimum requirement of two. The future looks bleak. Union finance minister Arun Jaitley's budget on February 29 is expected to only modestly hike outlays for the armed forces. It is unlikely to bring the army any cheer, because, as the PM warned, increasing manpower and simultaneously modernising will be near impossible. Here's why. The army consumes half the Rs 2.46 lakh crore defence budget, but spends nearly 70 per cent of it in salaries and maintenance, leaving just 20 per cent to buy new equipment. It requires at least Rs 10,000 crore each year to buy new equipment, but is left with only Rs 1,500 crore for new purchases after paying off pre-committed liabilities. It has a backlog of over Rs 4 lakh crore in new equipment—rifles, vehicles, missiles, artillery guns and helicopters—that have not been acquired for decades. Much of this equipment is also meant to give teeth to its new corps.

The Frozen Strike Corps

Prime Minister Modi's worries over the growing size of the Indian army began long before China's President Xi Jinping announced this January that he was trimming the world's largest army by 3,00,000 soldiers and transforming it into a more agile, lethal and technologically superior force. Sometime before the Union budget of 2015, the PM pored over a list of major expenditure items, looking for cost heads to prune so that budgetary allocations to the states could be hiked. His eyes hovered over the Rs 64,000 crore proposal for upgrading border infrastructure and to fully equip the still-under-raising strike corps. The PM balked at the proposal and reportedly asked for a review. One of the key findings of an internal review carried out by National Security Advisor Ajit Doval is believed to have recommended freezing the 17

Corps raisings at its present levels and absorbing it into the present holding corps along the China border.

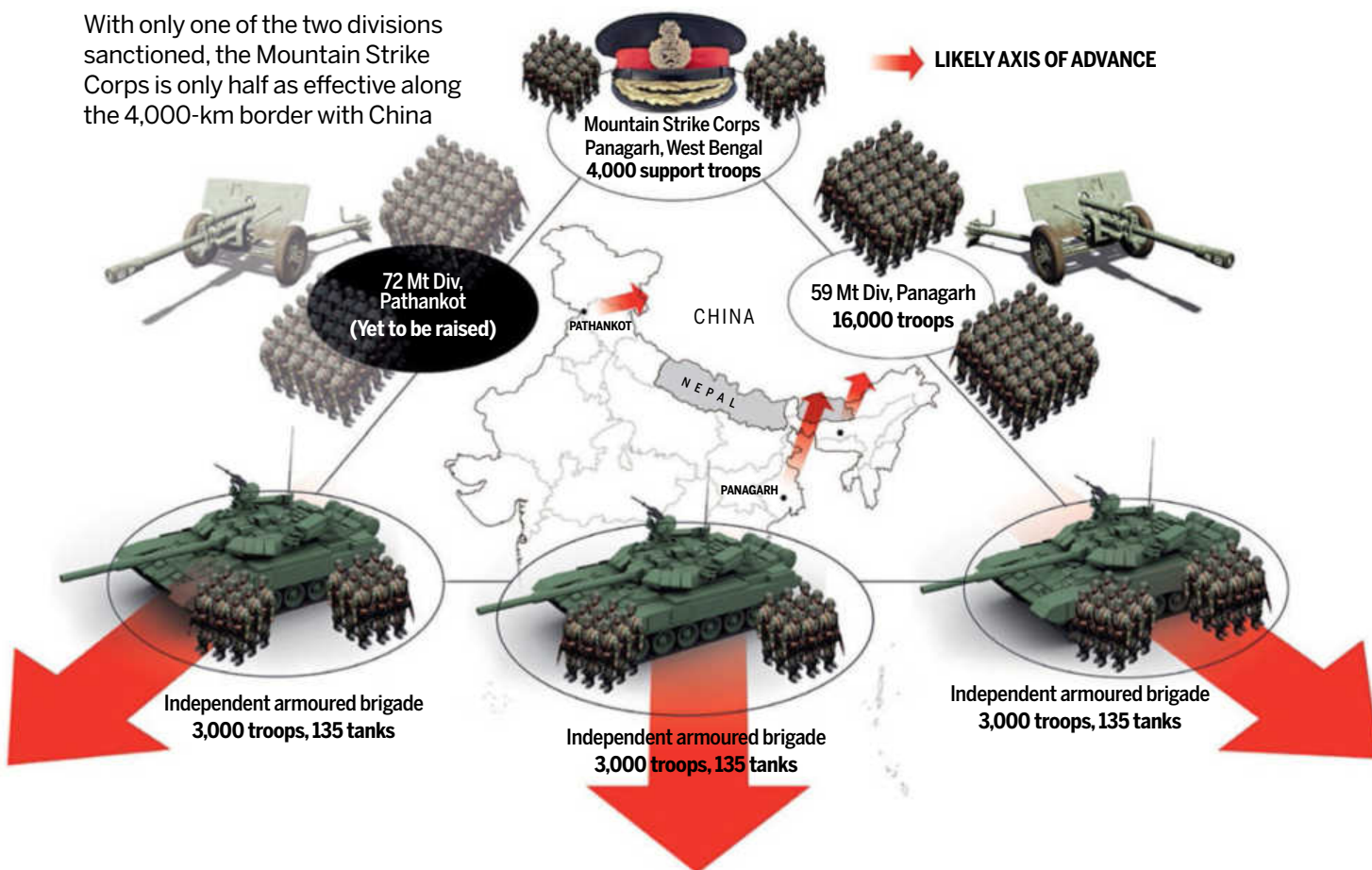
In a media interview last April, Union defence minister Manohar Parrikar said that the government had halved the size of the corps—down to Rs 38,000 crore over eight years and 35,000 men. He blamed the previous government for making the higher estimates without catering for budgetary allocations, but clarified in another interview the following month that the strike corps was only being slowed down, not scrapped. A senior army official denies there has been any reduction in the funding or equipping of the corps. “Everything is going on at full steam,” he says. The only delay, he says, has been caused by the Ordnance Factory Board that has been slow to replenish ammunition stocks from its War Wastage Reserves. The army has good reason to deny a slowdown of the corps. They claim the offensive deterrent capability had unsettled the Chinese even before it had been fully raised. Defence analyst Mandeep Bajwa warns the slowdown could have long term implications on the border. “The new corps had worried China which then toned down its belligerence along the border,” he says.

Stalled Counter-Punch

The strike corps are offensive formations which, the army is fond of saying, has no tasks on its own soil. It is a purely offensive force directed at the enemy. A general who did the spade-work for the Mountain Strike Corps explains its logic. Imagine a boxing bout, he says, where one contestant is constantly on the defensive even as his opponent rains blows, finally beating him to a pulp. “When you fight a defensive battle,” he says, “you lose flexibility.” The Strike Corps was to radically alter the army's traditionally defensive stance since the humiliating defeat in the 1962 border war with China. It was to be the Indian army's left and right hook, launched on the high altitude deserts of Ladakh or through the mountains of Arunachal Pradesh. Backed by artillery, Brahmos

DRAGON STRIKE FORCE

With only one of the two divisions sanctioned, the Mountain Strike Corps is only half as effective along the 4,000-km border with China



missiles, light tanks, special forces and helicopters, these two mountain infantry divisions would break through Chinese defences, cross over into the Tibetan plateau and capture territory that would be a bargaining chip in a post-conflict settlement.

The challenges are formidable though. Right now, the divisions would have to ascend from the plains at 500 metres up to heights of over 5,000 metres on the Tibetan plateau. Unlike the plains where strike corps attack in ratios of 1:3, three attackers for every defender, manpower intensive mountain warfare needs a ratio of 1:9. The strike corps evolved under NDA-I after the Kargil War of 1999 and the massive 11-month Operation Parakram deployment on the Pakistan border, which began in December 2001. The Indian army

prepared new doctrines for limited wars under the nuclear umbrella.

The rapid Chinese infrastructure build-up across the disputed 4,000-km line of control with China revived the spectre of a simultaneous war with that country and Pakistan. The army, they believed, could no longer rush troops from the LAC with China, towards the Pakistan border, as it had done during Operation Parakram. Through its massive network of all-weather roads on the Tibetan plateau and the new Qinghai-Tibet railway line, the PLA could now mobilise against the Indian army anywhere it chose. "We war-gamed the scenarios dozens of times," says a general commanding a strike corps, "the conclusions were always the same. The Chinese could get us wherever they wanted. We had nothing to deter them with, no high-value

target we could seize and hold."

These fears manifested in the raksha mantri's operational directive to the armed forces in 2009, a Top Secret 'eyes only' document, asked the armed forces to prepare themselves for a 'two-front war' simultaneously against Pakistan and China. That year, the army raised two more divisions, the 56th and the 71 mountain divisions, comprising over 30,000 troops to bolster the eastern front's defences.

Army planners built upon the model of Operation Falcon in 1986 when then army chief General Sundarji airlifted an infantry brigade to a face-off with intruding Chinese troops in the Sumdorong Chu valley in Arunachal Pradesh. Under then army chief General N.C. Vij in 2003, the army came up with the Cold Start doctrine for rapid shallow thrusts on the



PM MODI INSPECTING A GUARD OF HONOUR AT THE KOCHI COMBINED COMMANDERS' CONFERENCE, DECEMBER 14, 2015

YET TO WALK THE TALK

PM Modi has said all the right things to the armed forces but little has happened on the ground. Jointmanship, or the closer integration of forces and budgets that would deliver more bang for the buck, is yet to take off.

1 PERMANENT CHAIRMAN CHIEFS OF STAFF

A single-point military advisor to the government. Will push joint planning and budgets of the three services.

First proposed in 2001 (as Chief of Defence Staff). Revived in 2013, **yet to be sanctioned**

2 SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

Unified command to integrate special forces of all three services

Proposed in 2002, **yet to be sanctioned**

3 SPACE COMMAND

Integrated space surveillance assets of all three services to be headed by an IAF officer

Proposed in 2013, **yet to be sanctioned**

4 CYBER COMMAND

Integrated offensive and defensive capabilities of three services, headed by Indian Navy

Proposed in 2013, **yet to be sanctioned**

border with Pakistan, and a mountain strike corps that would be raised by the 12th Plan (2012-2017). The corps was fine-tuned by successive army chiefs over the years, but were stonewalled by the UPA, unsettled by its cost and offensive nomenclature. That was until PLA soldiers intruded 19-km deep into eastern Ladakh's Depsang Valley in April-May 2013, triggering a 21-day face-off and setting alarm bells off in South Block. The army seized the opportunity. Then army chief General Bikram Singh personally briefed the cabinet committee on security headed by then prime minister Manmohan Singh to urgently sanction the strike corps to deter Chinese adventurism. The generals shot holes in the Indian navy's scenarios that its submarines could choke China's energy lifelines in the Malacca Straits. The international

community would not allow the blockading of such a key global commons, the army reasoned, and the war would be over even before such a blockade could take effect. The army had its way. In July 2013, the UPA cleared the proposal for the corps as part of its plan for 'capability development along the northern borders', a catch-all phrase for enhancement of roads, railways, airfields and communication facilities. The strike corps would be raised over eight years, by 2021, hopefully by when nearly 3,000 km of border roads, sanctioned over a decade ago but being built at a sluggish pace, will finally be completed.

The corps was headquartered in Panagarh, West Bengal, ironically a key Allied airbase during World War II from where 'over the hump' resupply missions were flown into China.

The corps headquarters would handle two offensive divisions spread nearly 3,000 km apart. In the event of a conflict with China, these divisions would strike across into Tibet and capture enemy territory in areas lightly held by the PLA; this territory would provide a face-saver and a bargaining chip to be used in post-conflict resolution. The danger, of course, was that it risked enlarging the area of conflict.

Analysts say it would be unreasonable to expect the strike corps to produce viable results in the limited time-frames of a future conflict. This is particularly true since the critical road axis along which the strike corps would advance is yet to be completed. Last year, Parrikar informed the Lok Sabha that only 19 of the 73 strategic road links on the Chinese border had been completed.

With budgetary dangers hovering over the force, analysts call for more prudent measures to deter China. Vice-Admiral Shekhar Sinha (retired) points at a slew of stalled proposals (*see box*) that would help the armed forces fight jointly. "Only a permanent Chairman Chiefs of Staff will be able to allot resources to tackle threats and prevent single-service solutions to complex threats." Air Vice-Marshal Manmohan Bahadur of the Centre for Air Power Studies calls for making air power an integral part of the solution. "Fighter aircraft, helicopters to swiftly move troops and beef up surveillance capabilities along the border."

Military analyst Colonel Ajay Singh (rtd), author of *A Spectrum of Modern Warfare*, calls for building up existing capabilities. "Instead of a massive strike corps, it would be better to develop the limited offensive capabilities of the holding corps in both Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh, by the infusion of additional independent infantry and armoured brigades," he says. But with the government yet to clear the air, the strike corps' first battle for survival, it seems, will be on its own soil.

Follow the writer on Twitter @SandeepUnnithan



THE CAPTAIN LEADS THE CHARGE

Amarinder Singh is on the road, rolling out the Punjab Congress campaign for the 2017 polls

By Asit Jolly

There's still over a year left for the assembly polls, but former chief minister Capt Amarinder Singh is already out there clocking more kilometres in the Punjab hinterland last month than in the 19 months since he defeated BJP heavyweight Arun Jaitley in Amritsar in May 2014. The freshly re-anointed Congress state party president is evidently a man in a hurry, his unusual, early-bird poll campaign galvanised by the daunting prospect of a twin electoral challenge in 2017—the ruling Shiromani Akali Dal-Bharatiya Janata Party combine and the rising new-kid-on-the-block, the Aam Aadmi Party.

At both New Moti Bagh, Amarinder's imposing family palace in Patiala, and at his place in Chandigarh, it's already beginning to buzz like old times. State police posses posted at the gates are distinctly more polite. Inside, he happily receives a swelling stream of supporters; no one, including the odd critic there to complain, is turned away, perhaps to deflect old charges of being "inaccessible" and "surrounded by infernal coteries".

Amarinder says he is intent on doing it differently this time. "No big rallies, at least not until the final few days before polling," he tells INDIA TODAY, taking a cursory last look in the mirror before heading out to what he hopes will be "a no-holds-barred" interaction with some 1,000 students on the Panjab University's sprawling campus in Chandigarh on January 28.

The 73-year-old's return to the helm (for the third time) on November 27 reflects a definite rethink on Congress vice-president Rahul Gandhi's earlier moves to try and effect a 'generational shift' in the states. The induction of Pratap Bajwa, 58, in March 2012 following the party's second consecutive defeat in the state, had clearly failed to work, the resulting factionalism leading to a majority of leaders rallying behind Amarinder.

So what inspired the change of heart in Delhi? "I really have no idea," says Amarinder. "Rahul called me shortly after my return from

Amarinder's PLAN FOR 2017

The Punjab Congress chief is planning a whole new campaign strategy

1

No big rallies. Singh plans an intensive campaign personally engaging with voters in clusters of 6–8 villages

2

Big social media campaign to engage with younger voters (18–35 years) on Facebook, Whatsapp and Skype sessions. Social media team already at work in Chandigarh.

3

Plans to personally visit all major universities and colleges in the state

4

Work under way to raise big volunteer force through the NSUI units in Punjab's colleges and universities

5

Singh to engage with expat Punjabi communities in Canada, the US, UK and Australia. Planning visits this summer in addition to live interviews and phone-in shows on community FM radio and TV networks.

6

Master poll strategist Prashant Kishor to help craft a personality-driven campaign drawing on his charisma and stature

London in early November saying they had decided to make me the PCC president," he says. (Insiders insist the Congress high command was unnerved by the Captain's threats on floating a separate party, a rapprochement seems to have done the trick.)

Amarinder, who had famously faulted Rahul Gandhi for not knowing India enough on September 20, has turned discernibly cautious. "I can tell you now after my interaction with him (Rahul) over the past few months, I have found him very perceptive," he says. "No one is born a leader. People build themselves and mature. And I am sure when the day comes, he (Rahul) will be a great leader for this nation," he says acknowledging the latter's efforts to engage with Punjab. "He is very receptive. We agree most of the time. But he often has an argument that is stronger than mine," Amarinder concedes in a telling redefinition of his relationship with the "de facto Congress boss".

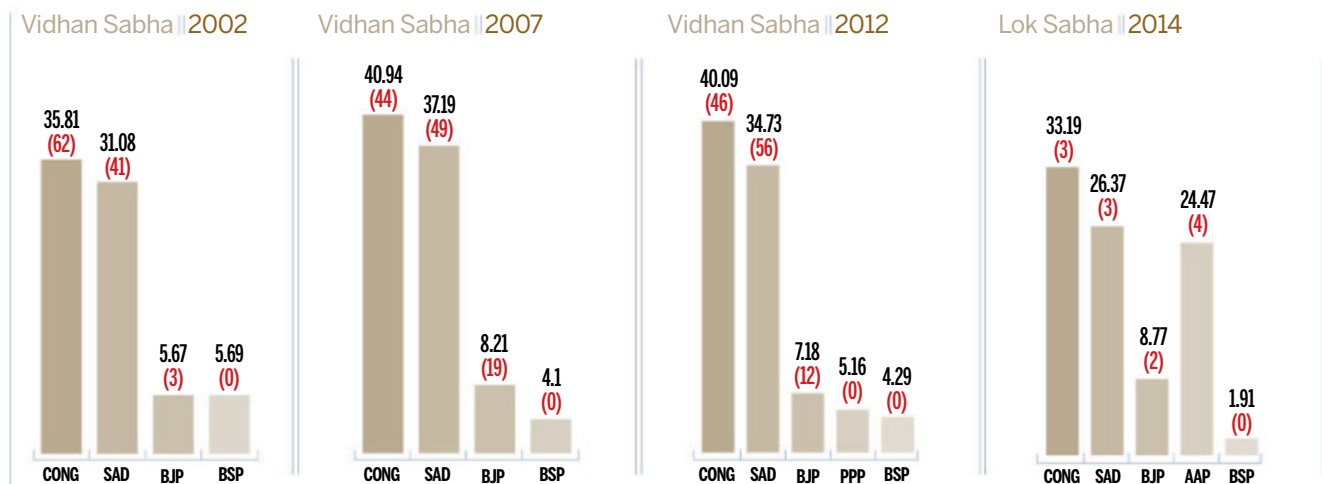
Party sources in Delhi, however, say the decision to redeploy Amarinder was essentially prompted by the realisation that Punjab, where the ruling SAD-BJP coalition is facing 10 years of anti-incumbency, represents the surest opportunity of a turnaround in political fortunes following the string of drubbings since Lok Sabha 2014.

Back at the law auditorium in Panjab University, Amarinder walks in to a thunderous standing ovation. And just as he wanted, it's a 'no-holds-barred' discussion: "You want to be chief minister. But who will be the real movers? You or the coterie that surrounds you?" asks Tanheer Bariana, a sprightly young student of human rights. The Captain blinks, a trifle unsure, but is intent on responding: "As a chief minister, one needs both capable as well as loyal people." Responding to a similar query, he says, "No one can function in isolation. I have a mind of my own. I listen to everyone and take an informed decision."

The former CM, however, seems aware of the perils of continuing with the 'discredited' associations from his previous (2002-'07) tenure. The familiar backdrop of faces from the past years is conspicuously missing at this

HOW PUNJAB VOTES

Since 2000, how the Congress has fared with Amarinder at the forefront of things



SAD and BJP contested as an alliance

■ SEATS ■ VOTES IN PERCENTAGE

interface. He was similarly the only one onscreen during an engaging Skype session with college girls from Chabbewal, Hoshiarpur, on January 22. Ten days later, listening to farmers' problems in Sandhaur village or responding to young people's questions at the Turning Point marriage palace in Malerkotla, only local partymen, including ex-MLA Razia Sultana accompany Amarinder. In public, at least for now, the 'coterie' is not visible.

"Amarinder is the most credible face in Punjab, untainted by corruption or the trading of falsehoods," says ex-finance minister and chief minister Parkash Singh Badal's estranged nephew Manpreet Badal, 53, who merged his People's Party of Punjab (PPP) with the Congress in January.

Twenty years Amarinder's junior at Dehradun's Doon School, Manpreet, who many say is positioning himself for a significant national role in the party, believes the former possesses "the right mix of charisma and fearlessness that will put Congress in the lead in 2017". He points to how after leaving the Indian army, the Captain reclaimed his commission when war broke out with Pakistan in the monsoon of 1965. Manpreet also cites the former CM's success in taking on the "money and muscle" of the Shiromani Akali Dal headed by his uncle and cousin, deputy CM Sukhbir Badal. "He

frightens them," Manpreet says.

That Amarinder's return has the ruling alliance jittery is already showing. From being dubbed a "chronic turncoat" by CM Badal, vitriolic attacks by state BJP chief Kamal Sharma to being accused of being "hand-in-glove with Khalistani radicals", the Captain has become the centre of their barbs. Even the AAP's Arvind Kejriwal, when he launched his broadside against the Badals and PM Narendra Modi at the Maghi Mela on January 14, focused much of his attack on Amarinder, accusing him of being in cahoots with the ruling clan.

After close to five decades in politics, 2017 may well be the ex-royal's final crack at the hustings. It may also be his trickiest. The ruling SAD-BJP dispensation is, as Manpreet says, flush with resources (he calls it "loot") accumulated over 10 continuous years in office. And if the last polls—when deputy CM Sukhbir splurged generously and micromanaged the electoral arithmetic—are anything to go by, Amarinder could well find himself sitting it out again.

He is, however, convinced that the anti-incumbency has swelled far above the threshold where results can be 'managed'. "I have never seen a government so hated as these chaps," he says, confident that the "continuing ghastliness that began with police

opening fire on villagers protesting the tearing of the Granth Sahib at Behbal Kalan village of Faridkot (October 14) to the gruesome murder of Dalit Bheem Tank, inside a SAD leader's farmhouse in Abohar (December 11), to the outrage in the CM's own constituency, Lambi, after police forcibly snatched the body of a 12-year-old schoolgirl crushed to death by a SAD leader's bus" has pushed Punjabi voters far beyond "Sukhbir's machinations".

There's also the small matter of the AAP, who former Punjab Congress chief Bajwa believes is "the real threat". "We (Congress) somehow need to address and win over younger voters in the 18-30 age group who have only experienced the miserable governance of the Akali Dal and have no memory of Congress rule," he says. The challenge, says an Amarinder loyalist who wished to remain anonymous, "will be to convince voters that the Congress under him can ring in systemic change...young voters aren't simply looking for a change in government. Their parents have spent years switching regimes. They want assurance of a systemic change and that, whether it can deliver or not, is what AAP is promising them."

"I am 73, my time is almost over. I am doing this for you! You are the future subedars (rulers) of Punjab,"



MZHAZO

SHAKE ON THAT: AMARINDER SINGH WORKS THE CROWDS

Amarinder tells 2,000 wildly cheering youngsters in Malerkotla. “How many of you are my friends on Facebook?” he asks, and at least 500 hands go up. “There you are, my friends!” His campaign is pointedly talking to young people, the nine million (of the 2.9 crore Punjabis) between 18-35 years. He is ‘all ears’ whether it is Samir Malik, a Muslim primary school teacher in his mid-20s, or Swarn Singh Bhangoo, an evidently inebriated young farmer.

Happily wading into the crowd at the end of the interaction, an angry young Sikh steps up to ask, “A Congress government sent soldiers into Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple) in 1984. You think that was right?” Amarinder doesn’t blink: “*Galat si!* (It was wrong),” he says, gently reminding the youngster that he had quit the Congress then on the issue. “Just like four years later, in 1988, I quit as minister when the Akali government sent police into Harmandir Sahib (Operation Black Thunder),” he adds. The Captain has just won himself a new supporter and he’s just 20.

For a politician who owes his success to his fearless nature, both in taking on the party high command like he did by legislating the abrogation of all water-sharing agreements with contiguous states in July 2005, or in targeting the Badals, Amarinder says he wants to run a “positive campaign”

this time. Yes, that’s right, no Badal-bashing. He already has a team of economists and former civil servants working to flesh out a vision for Punjab that he says “will offer people new hope and real alternatives on livelihood issues”.

From Malerkotla, we drive to Zirakpur outside Chandigarh, for what will be his last pit stop of the day—the wedding reception of Akali leader Deepinder Dhillon’s son. Weddings in Punjab are amazing barometers of political loyalties. That Amarinder was the ‘guest of honour’ was a clear sign of the direction Dhillon was headed. (And for sure, Dhillon, who was expelled from SAD soon after, is now back in the Congress.)

It’s an interesting drive back.

AMARINDER SAYS HE WANTS TO RUN A “POSITIVE CAMPAIGN” THIS TIME. YES, THAT’S RIGHT, NO BADAL-BASHING... AND, AT LEAST FOR NOW, THE COTERIE TOO IS NOT VISIBLE.

Amarinder, in the front seat of the Toyota SUV, is engrossed—browsing social networks, responding to queries from supporters. He asks Nivran Sandhu, his 27-year-old grandson, for updates on ‘pageviews’ and ‘shares’ on posts about his youth interaction programmes. Through the two-hour-long drive, Amarinder looks up from his smartphone only occasionally—once to ask a staff officer to make arrangements for the cook in Chandigarh to learn the recipe for a chicken snack served at a friend’s home. “Ask him to use boneless chicken, it’s nicer than on-the-bone,” Amarinder says before going back to his new FB friends.

Manpreet is confident that the Congress’s traditional votebase in the state’s three regions—Majha, Doaba and Malwa—will hold and benefit the party in what is evidently emerging as a three-cornered contest. “It won’t be easy, but it is doable,” says the former SAD leader who opted to join the Congress under Amarinder in the face of many reported overtures from AAP. Meanwhile, Amarinder admits with characteristic candour that 2017 will be his last shot at electoral politics. But the man is clearly keen: “I essentially remain the soldier I started out as. I have never ever backed off from a fight,” he says, promising to give it his best shot.

Follow the writer on Twitter @Asitjolly



P. CHIDAMBARAM

A LOT OF ACTIVITY B

INSTEAD OF BEING COMPLACENT ABOUT GDP GROWTH, THE NDA GOVER

In the first three quarters of 2015-16, average GDP growth was estimated to be 7.5 per cent. It is certainly not good if you note that the growth rate is flat compared to the previous year. Some would argue 7.6 per cent (estimated) for the whole year is not bad. I want to push back against this complacent view.

QUESTIONS ABOUT GROWTH

Between the first half of 2014-15 and the first half of 2015-16, growth decelerated from 7.9 per cent to 7.65 per cent. For the whole year, the government's *Economic Survey* had predicted 8 per cent growth. The RBI's projection for the full year is now "7.4 per cent with a mild downside bias". The CSO estimate of 7.6 per cent has been received with scepticism. Many economists point to the 'disconnect' between the manufacturing growth rate and the index of industrial production. They also point to the assumption that Private Final Consumption Expenditure will double in Q4. Agriculture is estimated to grow at 0.58 per cent and this number is reflected in the acute distress in rural India.

Three issues should worry us. First, about the source of growth. Second, about the possibility that we may be overstating growth. Third, about the consequences of low nominal growth.

BREAKING DOWN THE NUMBERS

Most of the growth is on account of benign commodity prices and increased capital expenditure by the government. The mid-year analysis confessed that two of the drivers of economic growth—exports and private investment—are sputtering and there is no sign of a turnaround. This year, the government delayed the fiscal consolidation roadmap to allow itself an additional borrowing of 0.3 per cent to increase public spending. There is no evidence that the increase in public spending has crowded in private investment.

We are probably overstating growth. For the first time in recent memory, the GDP deflator used to derive the estimate of annual real GDP growth from nominal growth is 1 per cent. The RBI has raised serious issues with the way deflators are being used. It seemed to suggest that the deflator is lower than it should be. Nominal GDP growth is estimated at 8.6 per cent. Since the deflator is 1 per cent, it translates into real growth of 7.6 per cent.

If nominal GDP growth continues to be low, there will be consequences: government debt as a percentage of GDP would increase faster, and this will make debt servicing all the more difficult. Also, the fiscal deficit as a percentage of GDP will be larger and the government would have to slash expenditure or raise more revenue.



GETTY IMAGES

This problem affects firms as well. There is already high financial stress: for all firms, operating profit in Q3 declined by 7.38 per cent year on year. For non-financial firms, the ratio of operating profit to interest expenses has worsened by about 15 per cent in the latest three quarters, going down from 4.83 per cent to 4.12 per cent. If growth is lower than the interest rate paid by the firms, this stress will only get worse.

WHITHER INVESTMENTS AND JOBS?

Let me now turn to other economic indicators, beginning with the main driver of growth. The total proposed investments in the first eight months of 2015 were about 30 per cent lower than in the same period a year ago.

In the first three quarters, net sales of firms fell by 6 per cent compared to the same period a year ago, marking the fourth successive quarter of shrinking sales. With sales falling by 11.5 per cent, the manufacturing sector looks particularly bleak. According to the RBI, non-food credit growth is at 11.2 per cent. Credit to industry is growing at 5.33 per cent. Credit deployment to medium enterprises

UT LITTLE ACTION

MENT MUST INVEST IN HUMAN CAPITAL AND REFORM MARKETS



STUDENTS AT THE
CAMPUS JOB FAIR IN
DELHI UNIVERSITY

THE GOVT IS CELEBRATING INCREASE IN FDI FROM \$36 BN IN 2013-14 TO \$44 BN IN 2014-15. BUT FDI HAS BEEN IN THE RANGE OF \$35-46 BN SINCE 2006-07. IT SHOWS NO UPWARD TREND.

actually shrank by 7.62 per cent.

During April-December (cumulative), year on year index of industrial production rose by 3.16 per cent. However, in December, the overall index shrank by 1.34 per cent and the index of manufacturing alone shrank by 2.44 per cent. Core sector growth during the first three quarters was a dismal 1.86 per cent. Demand, therefore, does not appear to be picking up.

Exports declined by 17.64 per cent in April-January. We have witnessed an unprecedented 14 consecutive months of exports shrinking year on year. Receipts from services exports fell by 0.54 per cent in April-December. Nobody in the government seems to know what to do except blame the global situation.

On jobs, wherever you go, the question is “where are the jobs”? The 26th quarterly employment survey, conducted between April and June 2015, showed that job creation in the manufacturing and export-oriented sectors fell by a net 43,000 from the previous quarter, the worst performance in six years. In the same quarter of 2014, these sectors had added 1,82,000 jobs.

WHAT IS SAID, WHAT IS UNSAID

For more than a year, CPI inflation has been below 6 per cent. A steady decline in inflation began in November 2013 well before the new government took charge. The RBI's monetary policy mounted an attack on inflation. Commodity prices crashed because of external factors. In all this, the government had practically no role. In the one area where it did have a role, it did little, and failed to contain food prices. Food price inflation is about 6.7 per cent. The current account deficit (CAD) is 1.64 per cent at the end of Q2 because petroleum and gold prices are at historic lows.

The government is celebrating increase in FDI from \$36 billion in 2013-14 to \$44 billion in 2014-15, and from \$31 billion to \$41 billion in April to December 2015. Since 2006-07, FDI has been in the range of \$35-46 billion. There is, therefore, nothing in the latest data that suggests a clear upward trend.

If there is one theme that defines the governance approach of the present government, it is this: there is a lot of activity, but little action. The government must have a two-pronged strategy: investments in human capital and reforms of markets. These agendas cannot be fulfilled without improving the administrative capacity.

COMPLETE THE UNFINISHED AGENDA

The UPA government gave India its best decadal performance since independence. The 10-year GDP growth was the best ever at 7.5 per cent under the old series and 7.7 per cent under the new series. GDP growth had jumped from 5.1 per cent in 2012-13 to 6.9 per cent in 2013-14. The best performance on job creation in the manufacturing sector was between 2003-04 and 2011-12 when job creation rose 7 per cent annually, 140 million people were lifted out of poverty. The deep cuts in the budgetary allocations for agriculture, drinking water, education and nutrition programmes seem to suggest that these are not priorities for the present government. This must be reversed.

The government should complete the UPA's unfinished agenda. The GST is an imperative reform, but the bill before Parliament is flawed. The government seems to have abandoned the Direct Taxes Code and the recommendations of the Financial Sector Legislative Reforms Commission. These are serious mistakes. In recent months, to put it mildly, we have seen too many acts of foolishness. There is still time to pause, reflect, make a course correction, and press forward.

P. Chidambaram is former finance minister and author of Standing Guard, A Year in Opposition, published by Rupa.

LOTUS IN GOD'S OWN COUNTRY

After a good show in the local body elections, the BJP is looking at a first, opening its account in the coming assembly polls in Kerala. It isn't done yet.



STATE BJP CHIEF KUMMANAM RAJASEKHARAN DURING HIS 'VIMOCHANA YATRA' ON JANUARY 20 THIS YEAR

By Jeemon Jacob

“Our victory in the assembly polls is certain,” says C.K. Padmanabhan of the Kerala BJP. “The Congress has decayed to the core and the CPI(M) has forgone its principles, it’s no longer the worker’s party. So it’s advantage BJP. The Bharatiya Janata Party is the only party which has credibility today.” The former state president of the party was being wildly optimistic (the BJP has never won a seat in Kerala), but it’s true that the coming assembly polls could be its best chance to open its account in God’s own country.

The BJP does have a fresh tag associated with it, since it’s pitching itself

as a third alternative to the time-tested coalition systems of the UDF and LDF. But its percentage voteshare is still way behind the other two (*see table*). In the past few elections, the saffron party has been able to tilt the balance in many constituencies, especially considering that winning margins run very close in the state. (In the 2011 assembly polls, at least five constituencies were won on a margin of less than 500 votes, in another 10 constituencies it was less than 2,500 votes.)

That said, the BJP now has bigger ambitions. It feels the clean image of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the fierce anti-incumbency against the scam-tainted UDF government of Oommen Chandy give it a big edge. The positive feedback in the initial phases

of the ‘vimochana yatra’ (liberation journey) led by newly minted state BJP president Kummanam Rajasekharan has also raised the mood somewhat. The Make in India campaign has been a roaring success in Kerala. The BJP’s social media campaign too has attracted a large section of the youth, so much so that the party which had just 4.5 lakh members in 2013, has added 16 lakh new members, mainly the youth. And, of course, Kerala has always had a large RSS cadre base. All put together, Padmanabhan feels this could provide the BJP assembly seats in the double digits. But for that, they’ll need to form a few local alliances, which has always been a stumbling block for the party in the state.

Earlier on in the campaign, there

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business today
FOR MANAGING TOMORROW

was talk of a tie-up with the Bharatiya Dharma Jana Sena (BDJS), a political group floated by the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Sangam (SNDP), the organisation of the majority Hindu community of the state, the Ezhavas. Bar owner-turned-politician-philanthropist Vellappally Natesan and his son control the BDJS, and the duo had flirted with the BJP for months, even meeting with RSS heavyweights and Union ministers. But that seems to be off now, with the SNDP beginning negotiations with both the UDF and the LDF in the past couple of weeks. But with Natesan, you never know, things could still change. A top state BJP leader says, "We aren't counting on Vellappally alone. His party, the BDJS, is yet to take shape. We have opened channels with other political parties too."

On February 19, the BJP's election management committee met at Nedumbassery near Kochi to review the situation. Union ministers J.P. Nadda (who is in charge of Kerala affairs) and Rajiv Pratap Rudy attended the meeting. The meeting assigned state-level leaders to each district to shortlist popular candidates for each assembly constituency. The final list will be prepared with the consent of the RSS leadership in the state.

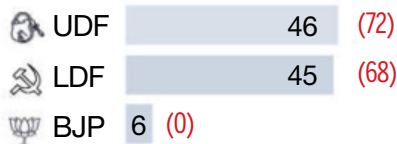
The BJP has come a long way in the last five years since the 2011 Kerala assembly polls when its vote-share was a mere 6.1 per cent. In the 2015 local body elections, it won an impressive 15 per cent voteshare and is even the main opposition in the Thiruvananthapuram municipal corporation. Now the party is eyeing a minimum of five assembly seats and planning to field senior leaders like Kummanam, former Union minister O. Rajagopal, ex-state party chiefs like Padmanabhan, V. Muraleedharan, P.S. Sreedharan Pillai and youth leaders like M.T. Ramesh and K. Surendran. Kummanam is also making efforts to bring back senior leaders like P.P. Mukundan and K. Raman Pillai who had resigned from the party in the past.

"Our performance in the recent local body elections indicates a new

FROM THE SHAKHA TO THE CITY

It's always been a two-horse race with the BJP a spoiler in crucial seats—2016 may be the breakthrough year

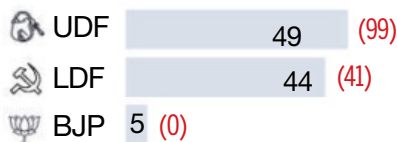
Assembly elections, 2011



Assembly elections, 2006



Assembly elections, 2001



■ Voteshare (%)

Figures in brackets are seats

Source: Election Commission

"Our performance in the recent local body elections indicates a new wave in favour of the BJP. I'm confident we can carve a mega win in the coming polls."

KUMMANAM RAJASEKHARAN

Kerala BJP president

wave in favour of the BJP. In four assembly segments, the BJP cornered over 40,000 votes; in nine others, 35,000 votes. We had a big presence in another 84 constituencies. It shows that the BJP is emerging as a big political force in the state with its mass base expanding fast. I'm confident we can carve a mega win in the coming polls," says the 63-year-old Kummanam.

The new state party chief took charge in December 2015. A pracharak since his school days, Kummanam was never a party functionary before this. Soft-spoken but firm, Kummanam has worked mostly with the VHP and the Hindu Aikya Vedi, a confederation of Hindu organisations. He is rated as a taskmaster and strategist, and has direct links with the central leadership of the BJP and RSS. A former journalist who started his career in the Malayalam daily *Deepika* (run by Catholic priests), Kummanam still maintains cordial relations with the Christian clergy as well as Muslim community leaders in Kerala. His 21-day 'vimochana yatra' covering all 14 districts has given some momentum to the party ahead of the assembly polls. He has even been poaching from the UDF and LDF. One of the BJP's big planks has been the "dignity of women". "We have taken up several issues concerning women and actively campaigned against sexual abuse and trafficking. It's gone down well, lots of women are now joining the party," says Kummanam.

Meanwhile, there are other unlikely elements rooting for a high-voltage campaign by the BJP. The Congress-led UDF leadership is counting on it as a "political shock-absorber" that may minimise what political analysts believe will be a humiliating defeat for it. Indeed, the Congress is hoping against hope that the BJP voteshare will divide the anti-incumbency wave to its advantage. If the BJP tilts some 3 per cent votes in its favour, the CPI(M)-led LDF will not have it easy. The BJP may not emerge as a significant player in terms of seats won in the assembly polls but as a pivotal player it will again tilt the balance of power in Kerala between the two main rivals.

Smart Money



BEST BETS FOR 2016

A FEW TIPS ON HOW TO GET INVESTMENT
SAVVY THIS FINANCIAL SEASON

-
- TAX BREAKS
 - SMALL SAVINGS
 - RETIREMENT MFs
 - GOLD
-

SAVE THE PRIME CUT

It's that time of the year when you have to line up investment proofs to save tax. A handy reckoner...



VIKRAM SHARMA

Around Dec-Jan every year, you get a mail from HR about submitting the investment/rent/housing loan proofs for the financial year which sends all of us, as employees, into a bit of panic. Are you confused as to what is to be submitted as investment proof to save tax? What will happen if you don't submit on time? Worry not, follow our guidelines below and save yourself a lot of heartache.

WHY SUBMIT INVESTMENT PROOF

- It helps your employer make final adjustments of TDS in your February and March salary
- The employer can ensure appropriate TDS is deducted on your annual salary
- It helps you avoid excess tax deduction at the time of filing your tax return
- One has to submit the declaration at the beginning of every fiscal year

INVESTMENT PROOFS YOUR EMPLOYER NEEDS One can claim...

- Deductions on repayment of principal and interest on a home loan. As proof, you submit your home loan certificates/EMI.
- Submit ELSS investment proof/other investment under Section 80C of Income Tax Act.

These include:

- Premium on your life insurance policies, health insurance plan, annuity received through deferred annuity plans, contributions to PF schemes, investments in certain equity stocks/debentures etc
- HRA by submitting your rent receipts. If rent is above Rs 8,500, then submit house owner's PAN details as well.
- For donation-related expenses, you will need receipts. It needs to be a tax-free one, though.

EXPERT VIEW

“Your employer deducts TDS on an estimated basis presuming that you will avail of all potential deductions and allowances. By submitting proof, you validate this assumption and do not pay extra taxes that you may claim a refund on.”

Vaibhav Sankla,
Director, H&R Block

you can claim when you file your tax returns for the year. Even though there will be some delay, the refund will come for sure.

- Employers generally take 2-3 months to adjust these deductions from your salary or to handle any kind of inconsistency

- **Note, if you have made investments after submitting income-tax proofs to your employer, then you can claim a tax refund when filing returns**

- Tax deductions offered under various sections of the I-T Act can still be claimed, provided you invest before D-day (March 31, 2016), barring certain exceptions.

SUBMITTING OTHER INCOME PROOFS APART FROM SALARY

- Any capital gains from MFs, RDs, FDs, shares, rental income can help you avoid penalty
- Capital gain proofs help get a clear picture of your taxable salary
- I-T deductions are more accurate if you mention your additional gains
- Declaring additional income helps you avoid penalty arising out of late payment of advance tax

For proposed investment proofs...

- Give a declaration that you will make certain investments. Your employer will deduct TDS based on this declaration.
- Employers accept written intention to invest in 80C instruments. But if proof is not submitted before cut-off date, higher TDS amount is deducted in the last months.

by Sarabjeet Kaur

Follow the writer on Twitter
@kaursarabjeet

- To get a clear picture of your taxable salary, you can disclose your savings bank interest, fixed deposit or recurring deposit interest earned during the year
- Capital gains on mutual funds or shares as other sources of income can also be declared, to avoid high penalty charges later

WHAT IF YOU FAIL TO SUBMIT INVESTMENT PROOFS?

- In case of non-compliance, employers can cut a much higher TDS after lapse of submission dates
- While you can still make necessary investments before March 31, they will not be reflected in your Form 16 and you will have to file for a TDS refund
- **Note, if you have mentioned certain investments but not really invested, then you have to pay higher income tax**
- If you don't claim now for any reason, don't worry,

VIKRAM SHARMA



SMALL STILL BEAUTIFUL

Small savings schemes remain attractive, park in liquid funds for the short term, gain from compounding in EPFO

Since the last one year, there has been a demand to reduce interest rates on small saving schemes following a 125 basis point reduction in repo rate by the Reserve Bank of India. Finally, the government has reduced interest rate on small saving schemes to align them with bank fixed deposits. So where should you park your cash for short-term needs: post-office time deposits or bank FDs?

CHANGE IN RATES

- The govt has reduced the 25 bps spread one-, two- and three-year term deposits have over govt securities of similar maturities
- The spread for Kisan Vikas Patras and five-year

recurring deposits has also been trimmed by 25 bps

- The new rates are effective from April 1, 2016
- The compounding of interest for National Savings Certificates and KVPs will now be done annually
- The rates of Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana (9.2%), the Senior Citizen Savings Scheme (9.3%) and Monthly

Income Scheme (8.4%) have not been changed

- Similarly, interest rates of long-term instruments such as five-year term deposit, five-year National Savings Certificates and Public Provident Fund is same

BACKDROP

- Small savings schemes were linked to the yield on govt bonds in 2011;

since then, they have been revised annually by the Central government

- Because interest rates of small saving schemes were higher, banks could not lower their FD rates further

WHAT YOU SHOULD DO?

- Currently, banks offer an interest rate of 7-8% on 1-3 year FDs. Post office time deposits offer revised interest rate of 8.15%.
- Though rates have been reduced, short-term post office schemes still give higher return than bank FDs
- The new 8.15% rate is effective from April 1, 2016. You can lock in your investments at the higher 8.4% rate before that.
- For short-term needs, you can invest in liquid funds

EMPLOYEES' PROVIDENT FUND

- Employees' Provident Fund Organisation has increased interest rate to 8.8% from 8.75% last year
- The raise may be marginal but its tax-free nature makes it one of the best instruments for long-term savings in the debt category

WHAT YOU SHOULD DO?

- Around Rs 22,000 crore lies in EPFO in accounts that have been inactive for 3 yrs, earning no income
- So if your account too is lying dormant, transfer your funds. Apply online, it not only helps track the status of your application, it also helps EPFO keep a check on employers for settlement of claims.
- Gain from the power of compounding; do not withdraw from PF needlessly.

EXPERT VIEW

“When comparing investments in fixed interest, look at rate of interest and tax implications for equivalent periods. For short term—up to six months’ requirement, a liquid fund may be a better option.”

Lovaii Navlakhi, Founder and CEO,
International Money Matters

by Teena Jain Kaushal
Follow the writer on Twitter @
teena_kaushal

NEST EGG FOR THE SUNSET YEARS

Though they are a repackaging of existing fund types, mutual fund retirement plans do help investors take a disciplined view of their sunset years

DBS, in its December 2015 India chapter report 'On Planning for a Successful Retirement', observed that 77 per cent Indians planned for their retirement and 40 was the average age they started planning for the same. To help them achieve their retirement goals, mutual funds too have come forward with multiple schemes that encourage disciplined and systematic investment.

MUTUAL FUND OPTIONS

- UTI Retirement Benefit Pension
- Franklin India Pension Plan
- Reliance Retirement Fund
- HDFC Retirement Savings Fund
- Tata Retirement Savings Fund

HOW IT WORKS

- Every retirement plan comes with a fixed mandate specifying feasible proportion of debt

and equity exposure

- Investment can either be lump sum or SIP
- If investing via SIP, a step-up facility allows investor to increase the amount of monthly instalment by a certain fixed amount at pre-defined intervals.
- Two of the oldest schemes (options 1 & 2) come with only a 40% cap on investment in equity
- The next two, which are relatively new, have various sub-plans, offering equity, hybrid debt and/or

hybrid equity plans

- The plans come with a lock-in period of 3-5 years and have an exit load from 1-3 per cent on redemption before age 58 or 60
- Barring Option 5, investments in all other schemes are eligible for tax break under Section 80C
- On maturity, the applicant can either withdraw full amount or opt for regular income in the form of dividends or systematic sale of units
- Certain fund houses provide an auto transfer facility within their schemes, wherein the investor can switch funds from one scheme to the other any number of times

VIKRAM SHARMA



EXPERT VIEW

“VPF/PPF savings are considered the most important source of income post-retirement. However, Indians are also exploring avenues like investments and annuities, insurance and property rental income. We saw this sentiment mostly consistent across India's top six metros.”

Shantanu Sengupta, Head, Consumer Banking, DBS Bank, India

SHOULD YOU BUY?

- Seasoned investors with exposure to markets via mutual funds as part of asset allocation can give these plans a miss
- These schemes are in effect repackaging of the existing fund types, coaxing investors to follow a disciplined saving pattern for their sunset years
- The critical advantage is that on maturity there is no compulsion to go for an annuity plan as with National Pension Scheme
- These schemes are very liquid compared to options available from insurance companies and NPS, though the five-year lock-in and exit load are dampeners.

by Jinsy Mathew

Follow the writer on Twitter @jinsymathew



GETTY IMAGES

GO FOR GOLD IN 2016

Were one to ask financial experts to name the best asset class in early 2016, few would have hit the right answer: Gold

UP, UP & AWAY...

- The rise in gold prices in international markets since the start of the year has been too quick to comprehend
- On a year-to-date basis, the yellow metal has rallied 14% in dollar terms and nearly 18% in rupee terms, making it the best asset class to be in
- In comparison, the bond fund yielded 8%; the highest yielding fixed deposit, a return of 7.5%
- When it comes to equity, benchmark Nifty had a meltdown of nearly 10%
- The appreciation in rupee terms has been sharper due to the weakening rupee which has already lost ground by nearly 3.5% against the US dollar
- The fall in global equity markets, including in India, has whetted any serious appetite for the asset class
- The risk-averse mood among the investors made sure that gold once again stood its ground as a safe-haven metal
- However, experts are

divided on whether this rally is sustainable

WHY THE RALLY MAY CONTINUE

China slowdown

There have been reports that China's GDP is likely to slow down to 6% in 2017 from the 6.5% projected in 2016, with growth unlikely to rebound in the near term. With Chinese equity markets in the doldrums and the real deposit rate

turning negative, Chinese gold buying is expected to pick up. This is likely to fuel the rally in the coming quarters.

Uncertainty in US rate hikes

Given low inflation fears and instability in global financial markets, the US Federal Reserve is unlikely to go ahead with a rate hike in March. From the earlier

talk of two hikes this year, market pundits have scaled down the expectation to a single hike or none at all. A prolonged period of low rates will prove to be supportive for gold.

Negative interest rate

Gold proved to be a safe bet all over again thanks to the negative interest rate policy adopted by several of the central banks in Europe, Japan, Sweden and Denmark. There is speculation that such a policy stance will actually backfire instead of helping the struggling nations because it will only distort financial markets. Given the integrated financial ecosystem across the globe, asset classes have turned sensitive to central bank policies.

FINAL TAKE

- The factors mentioned above cannot be wished away
- Weakness in dollar index due to geopolitical tensions will keep the interest in gold alive
- In case of a global slowdown, which looks more likely now than last year, the yellow metal will definitely shine brighter
- In India, gold will scale back to Rs 30,000 and upward per 10 gram; primarily due to the weak rupee
- Gold ETFs will continue to be the best way to invest. Regular investments based on financial goals are advisable.
- Investment in gold helps add diversity to your portfolio.

EXPERT VIEW

Price pattern is indicative that upwards momentum is likely to continue. So it is worth buying on dips now as the prices are likely to tread higher towards Rs 32,200/10 gm (\$1,350 an ounce) from a medium-term perspective.

Jayant Manglik, president, retail distribution, Religare Securities

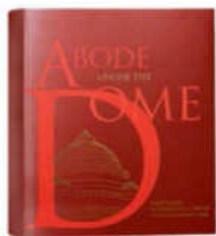
All the current factors which are driving the yellow metal price are likely to remain unchanged, leading to further upside. This goes with a caveat—volatility is the new constant. A gradual increase is desirable and more sustainable than sudden spikes or drop in prices.

Keyur Shah, CEO, precious metals business, Muthoot Pappachan Group

by Jinsy Mathew

Follow the writer on Twitter

@jinsymathew



**Abode Under the Dome: State
Guests at Raisina Hill, 1947-67
and their subsequent visits**
by Dr Thomas Mathew
Publications Division, I&B ministry
Pages 328; Price Rs 2,300

HOUSE ON THE HILL

BUILT BY EDWIN LUTYENS, HOST TO PRESIDENTS AND QUEENS,
RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN FINALLY GETS A BOOK WORTHY OF ITS HISTORY



THE ASHOKA HALL AT RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN

By Kaveree Bamzai

There are many pleasures in *Abode Under the Dome*, once you learn how to read it without buckling under its substantial weight. There are anecdotes which are curious, comic and quite extraordinary. There's Canadian prime minister John Diefenbaker on a visit to India in 1958, receiving an advisory from the external affairs ministry when he goes off to Kota on a tiger hunt with the Maharaja. His image, he is told, will suffer badly if he actually shoots a tiger, or worse, if he is eaten by one. There's USSR's Leonid Brezhnev, on a visit in 1973, whose entourage insists on a Lifebuoy soap in every room, much to the befuddlement of Rashtrapati Bhavan staff who want

to give him the best toiletries. And there's China's Chou-en-Lai, who is sent an Indian aircraft to pick him up from Geneva and who thanks the crew by handing out "high-class" Chinese cigarettes.

The doorstopper, filled with old photographs, letters, and in one case even a telegram, painstakingly recreates state visits to Rashtrapati Bhavan between 1947 and 1967. It's fragrant with the memory of a lost era—a *Times of India* headline for the Russian leader's visit says '*Delhi goes gay to greet Brezhnev*'. The leaders who walk through the pages are stars from the post-Second World War days. Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, who read Jawaharlal Nehru's *Glimpses of World History* as a student; Egypt's president Gamal Abdel Nasser who is greeted at the airport by a silk sari-clad



ABOVE, JAWAHARLAL NEHRU, S. RADHAKRISHNAN AND RAJENDRA PRASAD WITH CHOU EN-LAI IN 1954; YUGOSLAV PRESIDENT JOSIP BROZ TITO WITH RAJENDRA PRASAD



Indira Gandhi twirling a parasol; a dazzlingly young Queen Elizabeth who signs herself in as Elizabeth R.

There's not much the reader can do except to stare bug-eyed at the pictures, overcome by nostalgia. But take a moment (or more) to delve deep into the history in its pages. Enjoy the attention to detail of the Rashtrapati Bhavan staff as they send for a sofa set from Government House, Shimla, to make Queen Elizabeth feel at home; waive the prohibitory order enforced in the then state of Bombay to enable Yugoslav president Josip Broz Tito to have his favourite

plum brandy on the train from Bombay to Delhi (he landed in Mumbai in 1954 after a 15-day sea voyage); and an especially composed poem by Harindranath Chattopadhyaya for USSR first deputy, Anastas Mikoyan.

With its 340 rooms, 37 fountains and 227 towering columns, Rashtrapati Bhavan covers an area of 2.1 million square feet and is larger than the Palace of Versailles. But it's not just a home for the President, or perhaps Edwin Lutyens's finest work. It's a museum (with recently restored antiques, such as a jacuzzi with brass taps), a more-than-competent restaurant (able to rustle up international menus with no trouble) and one of India's best hotels.

An additional secretary in the President's Secretariat, Thomas Mathew's scholarship imbues the book with heft and his seamless writing makes it an easy read. It also makes us proud of those who stand and serve. No effort is spared for those who visit: the train Broad Gauge Special makes a three-minute special halt at Bharatpur, nearly 200 km south of Delhi, every day of Queen Elizabeth's visit in 1961 so she can have fresh milk, and a special effort is made to procure a hard, high single bed for the six-foot, four-inch American vice-president Lyndon Johnson in 1961 so he can sleep comfortably.

The guest is God, writes President Pranab Mukherjee in the foreword, and indeed in restoring and refurbishing his temporary home, he is showing himself to be a true student of history.



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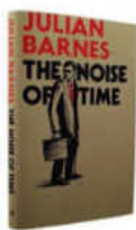
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ART OF VODKA

Music and propaganda. An imagined life of composer Shostakovich in Stalin's Russia.

By Deepanjana Pal



The Noise of Time
by Julian Barnes
Random House
Pages 192
Price Rs 699
(Hardcover)

"To be a coward was to embark on a career that lasted a lifetime," writes Julian Barnes in his brilliant new novel, *The Noise of Time*. Set in Soviet Russia, it's a fictional biography of composer Dmitri Shostakovich. Considered one of the greats of classical music in the 20th century, Shostakovich was feted and harassed in equal measure by the governments of his time.

Shostakovich and his compositions bewildered the authorities. He didn't write simple, modest anthems that eagerly tried to become proletariat-loving earworms.

Instead, he wrote pieces of soaring melody, often pulling together elements of cacophony, confusion and the grotesque to create unconventional harmony. Frustration roiled in the musical movements, and yet in his behaviour and demeanour, Shostakovich seemed harmless. He made the statements that were expected of him, denounced in public those whom he revered in private, and signed more or less anything that he was asked to—all in the hope of being left alone to compose music.

The Noise of Time won't give you every detail of Shostakovich's life. It uses three mundane moments as prisms through which his past is viewed. The novel begins in the 1930s, when Shostakovich's popularity was at its height. Unfortunately, this meant Joseph Stalin wanted to hear this celebrated composer's latest work and that's when everything fell apart. Stalin hated what he heard and as a result, when we meet Shostakovich, his suitcase is packed, it's the dead of the night, Shostakovich is dressed in a suit and waiting nervously for his inevitable arrest. By the end of the novel, the composer is still waiting. Only now, it's for death.

Written as a series of flashbacks, *The Noise of Time* moves forward even as it looks back. Nestled in each moment that Barnes has selected from the composer's life are memories, anxieties and consequences that come together to create a nuanced portrait. Shostakovich is very much Barnes's hero, but that doesn't stop the novelist from making fun of him from time to time. Barnes also possesses a predatory alertness to the absurdity that characterised living in the impoverished and oppressed Russia over which Stalin ruled. Episodes like how Shostakovich got his name and why Russia is "the homeland of elephants" sparkle with humour that is as cutting as it is funny. This book is as witty as it is sensitive and it shows Barnes at his finest as a novelist.



ALAMY

POTENT FURY Julian Barnes

The novel is also a brilliant exploration of the idea that art should be functional. Its value in Soviet Russia lay in art's ability to be used for propaganda. *The Noise of Time* describes with beautiful bitterness how art suffers when it is merely a tool through which people may be influenced and favour may be curried. Barnes also writes about the challenges artists must face when they need approval from the state for everything, from buying manuscript paper to having a public performance of the music they have written. What emerges is a portrait of not just a person, but of a system and its counterpoint.

Power, as embodied by the likes of Stalin and Nikita Khrushchev, may seem whimsical, but it chooses its targets meticulously. The agenda behind a regime targeting artistes and intellectuals as well as wooing them to appear on behalf of the government is to simultaneously present a harmonious facade, silence dissent and spread a paranoia that will mutate into fear and paralyse the populace.

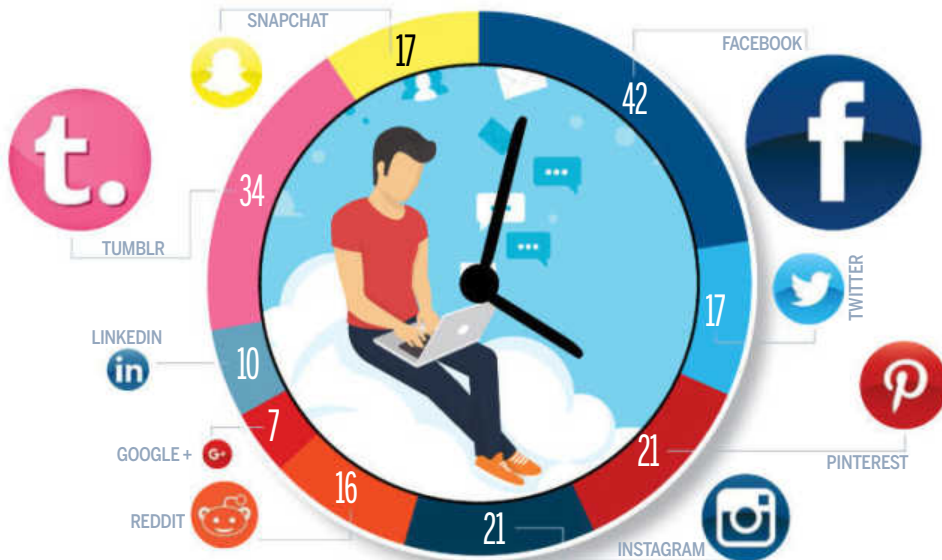
Barnes's Shostakovich is no gladiator—he puts up as little resistance as he possibly can. Although there is little love lost between the composer and the governments that use him, Shostakovich's fury is most potent when directed at Communism's cheerleaders in the West. He points out how myopic, naive and convenient it is to praise a system while living outside it, as people like G.B. Shaw did.

The Noise of Time may be set in the past, but it resonates with the present, and not just in Russia. After all, oppressive regimes may be found everywhere. The idea of culture as a battleground, intimidation as a controlling tactic and the government pitted against a minority intelligentsia is starkly familiar to many of us. The silver lining that Barnes offers us is that despite all the bleakness, poverty and misery, all it takes to create perfect musical harmony are three dirty glasses and a vodka. Cheers to that.

Deepanjana Pal is a journalist and author

THE SOCIAL NETWORK

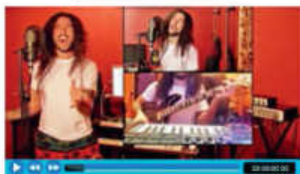
Here's the amount of time people spend on various social network sites daily



Source: Pew Centre for Research
Updated Feb 2016

All figures are in minutes

➔ viral video



A cover of Justin Bieber's *Sorry* rendered in various musical styles wowed 2 million



Demi Lovato's impersonation of musicians Cher and Christina Aguilera amused 7 million



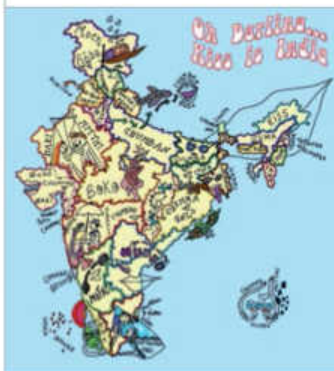
The story of a man's heartbreak pushing him to lose weight touched over 1 million

➔ web WOW



Let's Dance

A video of five men doing the bhangra to Fetty Wap's song *679* has attracted 80,000 likes and 50,000 comments. Posted by LearnBhangraApp, a school based in North Carolina, it features five dancers doing bhangra steps that surprisingly match the rap song.



➔ web win

Kiss & Draw

Agents of Ishq, a website dedicated to getting Indians talking about sex and love, released a GIF featuring the word 'kiss' in various Indian languages. It was created by artist Paroma Sadhana for the website started by Mumbai-based Parodevi Pictures.

➔ web lol

Phoning It In

Indian netizens reacted with humour to the news of Ringing Bells launching the world's cheapest smartphone at Rs 251. Using #Freedom251, they joked that the phone was hard to book because the website was slow to load. Some pointed out that the 3G datapack exceeds the price of the phone.



➔ Instachatter

Bye Bye Haters

A Valentine's Day Instagram post from sportswear brand Adidas got negative reactions for featuring a same sex couple. Adidas responded with posts and 'hand-waving' emojis that bid the close-minded customers who were offended goodbye.



➔ Weirdonet

Funds for the rich

After fans discovered that rapper Kanye West was in debt, some of them joined hands to start a GoFundMe account to raise \$56 million. So far, they have about \$8,000.



Follow the writer on Twitter @lkummi

➔ what's new

App Alert

Everalbum organises your photos, albums and videos in one place online



Being takes you to the Instagram feed of celebrities





TRAINING DAY

Wellness revamped and re-packaged for new-age gym goers is a far cry from traditional equipment-based workouts



INTERNATIONAL PLAYGROUND
AT THE FITNESS FIRST OUTLET
IN NEHRU PLACE, DELHI

By Sohani Dogra & Regi Jenarius

How many new-age fitness enthusiasts remember what gyms looked like back in the '90s? Claustrophobic, basement-converted spaces, with low ceilings and bulky equipment, frequented by men pumping iron. Sweat-slathered floors were testimony to the frenzied pace set by the trainers, hardcore boy scouts intent on pushing their clients to build muscles. The usual suspects at these gyms were image-conscious men and women working away on that half inch of imaginary flab, piling on layer upon layer of muscle. Zoom now in to 2016 and its drastically altered picture. Natural light, swathes of floor space in pop colours, yoga mats and exercise balls have nudged their way into the sacred zone of barbells and multi-purpose bench-press machines. Evident from the redesigning of modern gyms, conventional strength training is just one part of the fitness picture that has burgeoning pockets of power yoga, Zumba, Pilates and dynamic training such as Zuu. The demography of gym goers has expanded to reflect this variety of training options—there are now elderly couples, hipsters, middle-aged corporates and power mummies hitting the gym with equal gusto.

Memberships at these revolutionised fitness centres aren't just a reflection of enrolment but are a mandate of sorts on the evolution of the fitness scene. For fitness-seekers today, sloughing off the extra pounds isn't an immediate priority, focusing on a healthier lifestyle is. To accommodate the growing popularity of functional fitness, there's been a spatial transformation. Users can cherry-pick between routines, flitting from high-intensity exercises to yoga on the same floor. The internationally acclaimed fitness chain, Fitness First, is among the first few to have marketed the concept well in India. Their Nehru Place outlet boasts of a freestyle training area dubbed the International Freestyle Playground. The most obvious and tangible aspect of this change has been effected in the basics, that is the exercising formats. Giving the heavy machinery a miss, bodyweight training has gained credence as the most touted medium to achieve fitness targets. The highlight of this is functional training (FT). This means TRX stations, battle

ropes and special group training areas have taken centrestage at modern-day fitness facilities.

Targeting a functional yet athletic body, minus the freakish musculature that we have been conditioned to accepting as the epitome of fitness, is the new fitness paradigm. "Fitness (in the '90s) was an activity that involved going to a gym and lifting heavy weights in a grimy, smelly set-up," says Mumbai-based personal trainer and business owner, Kamal Singh. Most trainers today believe that the monotony of workout routines was what led to FT gaining popularity.

WHY FUNCTIONAL TRAINING

In contrast to conventional training, which is primarily done in a static position and in one plane of motion, FT uses the entire body. So, once you have understood the mechanics of how your body moves and improved on it, you can functionally get it to doing anything you want, and do it better than you had imagined. "Whether that means carrying groceries, running a marathon without aches or even climbing a mountain," says Vesna Pericevic Jacob, author, physiotherapist, fellow of Gray's Institute of Functional Applied Science.











Though the face of fitness had been evolving on the global front for over a decade, FT gained visibility in Asia only after it was popularised in the early 2000s by trainers such as David Weck, the creator of BOSU Ball. The turning point came around 2005, thanks to gym goers wanting to break the pattern of working out through repetitive sets. "I look forward to heading to the gym instead of a park to play football now. The gym playground with battle ropes, tyres and jungle gyms is unique in the sense that it gives me the space to create a dynamic and adventurous routine," says Rajeev Chautala, a Delhi-based bank manager.

THE BUSINESS PERSPECTIVE

According to a recent PwC study, 'Riding the Growth Wave', fitness services in India form a comprehensive part of the Rs 49,000 crore-wellness industry in the country. Fitness alone accounts for Rs 4,000 crore and fitness along with slimming centres accounts for 65 per cent of the market. It is indicative of growth in the industry that along parallel lines, fitness services are branching out and evolving.

FITNESS FASHION

The benefits of traditional weight training are well-documented. But, apart from building musculature, the benefits of functional training outweigh that of its conventional avatar.

	1	2	3	4	5
TRADITIONAL WEIGHT TRAINING	Isolates one muscle group at a time 	Most exercises can be performed either seated or standing stationary 	Restricts the use of range of motion 	Doesn't focus much on postural development 	Tightens muscles, hardening their structure 
FUNCTIONAL TRAINING	Uses several muscle groups at a given time 	Uses the core to stabilise the body in different positions 	Works in 360° range of motion targeting multiple muscle groups 	Works on improving body posture and structure 	Builds a leaner and more natural-looking musculature 

Graphic by SAURABH SINGH

Following the trend, fitness brands around the country, even in Tier II and III cities, are changing the infrastructure of their facilities to accommodate freestyle training sections. "But maintaining a perfect equilibrium (between kinds of workouts) is the only way individual fitness goals can be met on a long-term basis," says Ankit Khanna, a New Delhi-based former aerobics trainer.

Running fitness studios is a big business today and making the FT arena an essential part of it is catching on. "The FT section in the gym is looked at as a major highlight and even as an asset to the business," believes Vikas Jain, managing director, Anytime Fitness India.

Moreover, allocating space for FT doesn't dig too deep into the pockets of business owners because a quintessential set-up costs not more than 20-25 per cent of the total investment on equipment. "Besides that, the cost-to-benefit ratio is really high when it comes to the maintenance of the equipment. While it could cost you anywhere between Rs 20,000 and 50,000 to maintain conventional weight training and cardio machines during the year, FT equipment such as boxes, TRX ropes, sandbags,

kettlebells don't require much maintenance," affirms Dr Chirag Sethi, a fitness and nutrition expert, Anytime Fitness. However, not all FT equipment can be categorised as low-budget and the major players operating in the segment don't necessarily look at it as an option for reduction in costs but as upgrading of the facility.

THE ROAD AHEAD

The larger question is, should FT be adopted as a practical and superior means to a fitter body? Data seems to suggest that it's here to stay. Every new centre of Sportsfit by M.S. Dhoni, for example, has a pro shop and an FT set-up. "Even the smallest set-up will have an area of at least 600 square feet cordoned off for FT," says Sheru Angrish, director of business development for the company. Most people today are not looking to build or maintain a perfectly symmetrical six-pack or rock-hard muscles unlike a few decades back, but are striving for a lean physique. "The fact that all I need is my own body weight and some space to better my everyday fitness levels keeps me motivated to train regularly," says Kunal Shukla, a Mumbai-based doctor.

We are currently living in times

where fitness formats are being introduced and reworked every day and giving in to them is nothing but natural. But the flip side of this change is the fact that what is a rage today may not enjoy the same clout tomorrow. "The biggest mistake would be to think that this form of training is the only way forward," says Deckline Leitao, a Bengaluru-based fitness trainer. People had great bodies before FT came on the scene and continue to have them even today. Though there are many takers for functional training, it is far-fetched to assume that it has overtaken conventional weight training. Both exist and irrespective of which look is in, the old school commandments of keeping it simple, natural and old-fashioned hold true even under the modern nomenclature of freestyle training.

Fitness centres need to simultaneously keep the profits coming and accommodate consumer demands. The business of fitness has grown around gym culture but it is the rise of lifestyle diseases that propels it. As health concerns acquire urgency, FT has established itself as the flavour of this season.

Follow the writers on Twitter @SohaniDogra and @RGJthetrailblzr

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The Viral Vitriol Over JNU

Two hundred years from now, historians (apologies to Christopher Hill) would call it *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the Twitter Revolution on the JNU Row*. But right now, no one can stop laughing out loud.



AGAIN A FAKE TWITTER

This time, Delhi police commissioner B.S. Bassi fell for it—a parody Twitter account of journalist Ravish Kumar—and defended his (mis)handling of the JNU crisis manfully. “Committed to CONSTITUTION, NATION & TRUTH. SelfStyled Appraisers may better introspect.” This was the second time in a fortnight he was fooled.

NO POST-OFFICE IN KASHMIR?

Really? Posters for a Feb 9 event announce: ‘Poetry reading: The country without a post office.’
Hyderabad engineer K. Karthik takes it literally, files RTI application. The answer? J&K has 1,699 post offices.



Pandit: “*Shiela Rashid #VicePresident #JNU who is a #KashmiriMuslim shld be interrogated She had also opposed #BabaRamdev in #JNU. #Nationfirst.*”



OL' MAN RIVER

REMEMBERING PAUL ROBESON'S VOICE OF PROTEST



1898–1976

On Paul Robeson's 40th death anniversary, the world celebrates the life and legacy of one of the greatest performers of the 20th century

1915–1924

Just the third African-American to study at Rutgers University, he became a lawyer when Black men were still excluded from the American Bar Association

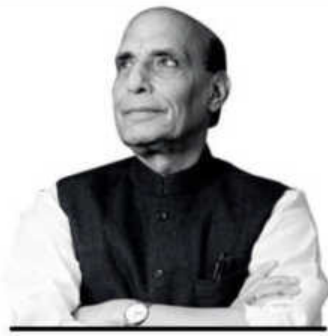
1925

“*Ol' Man River, he just keeps rollin' along,*” his song on the hardships of African-Americans, went on to become the signature tune of protest music



KEJRIWAL INSULTS HANUMAN

Who doesn't know that there's no love lost between Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal and PM Modi? But things went a bit too far when AK posted a monkey-burning-JNU toon on his Twitter account. The hashtag started trending, with one bright Twitterati asking: "If Hanuman burned JNU on orders of Modi, does that mean JNU is Ravan's Lanka and Modi is Lord Ram?"



HEY, IT'S A FAKE TWEET

What happens when the Union home minister gets influenced by fake Twitter handles? Ask Rajnath Singh, who claimed that JNU students had the backing of Jamaat-ud-Dawa chief Hafiz Saeed based on one.



WHAT THE HELL

Former CM Omar Abdullah is usually reticent. But censor board member Ashok Pandit had him frothing with rage on Twitter. The same Pandit who had badmouthed comic group AIB and Karan Johar, misspelt the JNUSU vice-president's name.



IT'LL BE MY CHANCE SOON

"Operation Sanitise JNU has just begun." That was Subramanian Swamy, the man who dreams of becoming V-C of the varsity. By "sanitise", he meant chucking out 'Naxal' teachers and students.



I'M A LIONHEART

Obscure lawyer Vikram S. Chauhan's video, beating up journalists and students, goes viral. He claims glory for the 'patriotic' act.



EVEN A DOG KNOWS THE DIFFERENCE

"Every dog that barks need not be arrested. What they did was wrong, but sedition charges bit too much." That was Chetan Bhagat's fearless take, despite the merciless trolling he receives every time he opens his mouth (er...his account).

Abdullah: "Now being a Kashmiri Muslim is crime enough to warrant interrogation. BTW it's Shehla not Sheila but what the hell!!"

1946

Was summoned before the House Committee on UnAmerican Activities by the FBI for believing in socialism and had his passport confiscated. Famously retorted, "You are the un-Americans."

1952

He was not allowed to travel and faced boycott. On May 18, he stood on the back of a truck and sang songs of defiance to over 40,000 people on the US-Canada border.



EYECATCHERS



Mr Goodenough?

Before the next season of IPL kicks off, **Preity Zinta** wants to kick off her Ms tag. She wants her beau Gene Goodenough, an LA based-financial consultant and senior VP, finance, with a hydel company, to become her husband.



NEW DIRECTION

Singer-songwriter **Ankur Tewari** of indie outfit Ankur and the Ghalat Family is turning to direction with the Y-Films web series, *Love Shots*. The six shorts will have some big actors including Nimrat Kaur, Tillotama Shome and Shweta Tripathi.

HOW WAS THE WEEK?



SUPER Team Ottal

The Malayalam film won the Crystal Bear for best film in the Generation Kplus category at the Berlin Film Festival



BAD

Girish Taurani

Loveshhuda, the actor's second shot at fame, was an even bigger misfire

HIGH FLIERS

After nine years in the industry, **Sonam Kapoor** finally earned unanimous acclaim. And, no, not for her sartorial sense. The 30-year-old delivered a poignant performance in *Neerja*, the story of flight attendant Neerja Bhanot, who died in a plane hijack. Kapoor wasn't the only bright star in the film, though. Here are three others whose work deserves equal plaudits.



Jim Sarbh

As the most menacing terrorist of the lot, the 27-year-old Parsi actor, best known for his stage performances, makes a fiery film debut. Sarbh recently featured in Kalki Koechlin's play *The Living Room* too.



Aparna Sud

Shimla-born Sud referred to technical flight manuals as well as a website set up by the ex-employees of Pan Am to recreate the interiors of the Boeing 747. It took a team of 250 people over 48 days to do it.



Monisha R. Baldawa

Her editing credits include documentaries, commercials and *Margarita, with a Straw*. Working on her second feature, the 33-year-old crafted a 2-hr cut from 300 hrs of footage, ensuring seamless transition between the present and flashbacks.



PUP TALK

Trust comedian **Aditi Mittal** to remind audiences about Tuffy, the canine star of Sooraj Barjatya's *Hum Aapke Hain Koun*. Mittal pays a tribute to the Pomeranian who played an integral part—from protecting shoes to uniting lovers—in the film. "He is one of the biggest and possibly the most unexplored character," she says. "Bollywood is unforgiving to one-hit wonders. It is cruel towards their talent. I want to bring Tuffy's tale to the fore." It releases on Mittal's YouTube channel next week.



Compiled by **Suhani Singh** Follow the writer on Twitter @suhani84

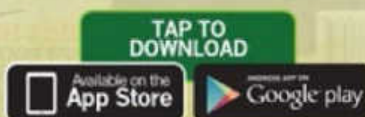
Volume XLI Number 10; For the week March 1-7, 2016, published on every Friday Total number of pages 84 (including cover pages)

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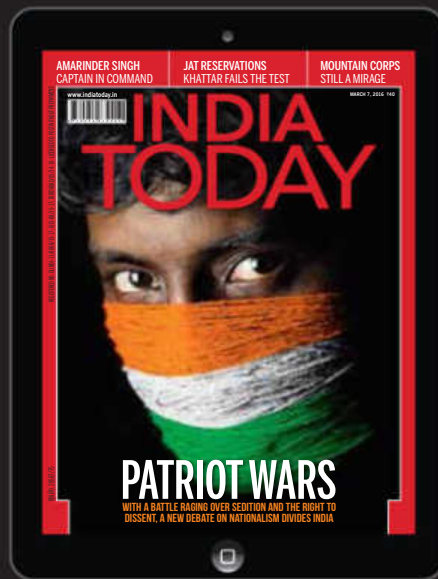


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Photograph by KRISHNENDU HALDER

COVER STORY

Health On A Platter
There's a lot the city has to offer
to health-food enthusiasts.

s-4

BUZZ

Into The City
Seven things to look forward to.

s-11

Cover photo by KRISHNENDU HALDER

OUR PICK of the month

City Views March 15 to 30

Celebrated photographer from Chandigarh Ajay Bhatia brings to Hyderabad his tribute collection to French architect and artist, Le Corbusier. According to Bhatia, Chandigarh has the unique attribute of being the only completely inhabited city designed by Le Corbusier. Bhatia's exhibition of pictures—Le Corbusier in India/A Play of Light—is inspired by the legendary architect's writings. At Alliance Francaise Gallery, Road No 3, Banjara Hills Tel 23554485



Want to tell us about an event? A new store? A restaurant? People doing interesting things?
Anything newsworthy? Please email us at: simplyhyderabad@intoday.com

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Cleanse High



By MONA RAMAVAT

SINDURA BORRA, 28, BECAME “DEDICATED to detox” after experiencing the healing effects of a disciplined regime during a long-drawn spell of flu. After she returned from California, US, in 2014, she decided to bring home the experience and started the online portal, Cleanse High, shortly afterwards. “Toxins are everywhere and the body needs regular detoxification. While water is excellent for flushing out toxins, you can’t survive by just drinking water through the day—you need something to boost your energy,” explains Borra. Unboxing eight glass bottles of beverages that form the detox diet for a single day regime, she says, “These drinks are packed with vegetables, fruits, herbs and spices to provide nutrition while you skip eating all solid foods for a day.” The bottles are all labelled with sequence numbers and the time of the day that they need to be consumed at, which makes it an easy-to-follow regime. First timers may find a day-long liquid diet not filling enough, “But since hunger is mostly psychological, I advise people to resist the urge to eat on a detox day,” says Borra, who has on board qualified nutritionists to design the regimes. A one-day regime is recommended once a week and a three-day regime is good once a month. “The impact is phenomenal including healthier digestion, better complexion and it is also the perfect ritual to kick-start weight loss.” Reduced craving for sugar and oily foods is a good after-effect of this diet, besides being a hangover remedy. “And we also offer special discounts to encourage smokers to detox for damage control,” she says.

► Price Rs 1,260 for a one-day regime

► At cleansehigh.com



Photographs by KRISHNENDU HALDER

Health on a platter

FROM MAGIC MILLETS TO DETOX DRINKS,
THERE'S A LOT THE CITY HAS TO OFFER TO
HEALTH-FOOD ENTHUSIASTS

Nikhil Shrivastava, owner, Freshies Gourmet Salad



THE FILM, 3 IDIOTS, CHANGED the course of 37-year-old Nikhil Shrivastava's life. "The line that Amir Khan says to Madhavan about taking a risk versus regretting not doing it for life had me giving up investment banking in London and returning home to India to pursue my entrepreneurship dream," he says. But his venture, Freshies Gourmet Salad, wasn't the result of a well-thought out business plan. "I had no idea whatsoever about what my business would be for months after my return. I just knew that I wanted to be an entrepreneur," says Shrivastava. His interest in healthy food prompted Shrivastava to start the healthy diets deli that serves over 30 varieties of salads, the recipes of which are all his own. "We don't have a chef in our kitchen and everyone, including the front office manager and the maid, are trained to toss salads," he says. On the drinks menu are



detox mixes alongside chilled coconut water. "No sugar has been added in anything," he says. A full meal by themselves, the salads are sumptuously packed with crisp Indian and imported vegetables or fish and chicken add-ons. "People in Hyderabad still can't imagine having only salad for a meal, so the menu has wraps and sandwiches too and air fryer prepared snacks like keema or pomegranate kachori made with jowar," he shares. They deliver anywhere in Hyderabad and over the last couple of years, his regular clientele has grown to include Telugu film stars and politicians. Shrivastava is already working on expansion plans beyond Hyderabad. "We will eventually go pan-India, and who knows, Freshies may open a branch in London too some day, with life coming full circle," he concludes.

►Price for two Rs 700 plus taxes ►At Telecom Nagar, Gachibowli ►Tel 64505505



DID YOU KNOW THAT jowar pops are a healthy alternative to popcorn? Or that foxtail millet is as nutritious as quinoa? Sai Krishna Popuri, 26, who started Health Sutra in 2014, explains the benefits of millets to anyone willing to switch to healthier eating habits, since much of our health is determined by what we eat. A graduate of IIT Delhi, Popuri chose to return to his roots, having grown up in Narsaraopet of Guntur district, with farmers and agriculture being an integral part of his childhood. His small but well-equipped processing unit employs over 15 people today and churns out kitchen staples like jowar flakes that you can make poha out of or jowar rawa for upma and ready-to-make idli and dosa batters made from millets. The idea stemmed from providing the busy urbanite with convenient options to incorporate millets in their diet on a daily basis. “These wholesome foods have been growing in India for centuries and our grandparents and generations before them used to eat them. So why don’t we switch back to them to counter lifestyle-related diseases instead of opting for quinoa, which is undoubtedly healthy but is an expensive fad borrowed from the West?” asks Krishna.

■ **Price** Rs 10 onwards

■ **At** Arogya Rahasya, Padma Rao Nagar; Healthsutra.in

■ Sai Krishna Popuri,
owner, Health Sutra



NO MORE HUNGER GAMES,' IS what you read on the website of The First Meal, and that's what the young founders of this venture strive to achieve by delivering healthy breakfast all over town, from 7 a.m. to 11 a.m. "I would get restless in the mornings after working till the wee hours on an empty stomach. There's how the idea of an online breakfast delivery germinated," shares Yuv Raj Poosarala, 26, a former techie. His friends, Saswata Shankar De, 25, Suraj Prakash Subedi, 23 and Ravi Varma, 25, found the idea inspiring enough to quit their corporate careers and join as partners.

With a new menu designed by them every day of the week, these boxed breakfasts are calorie counted and contain a variety of options including the staple south Indian idlis, dosas besides poha, vada pav, sandwiches and a whole lot more. Fruit boxes come packed with the goodness

of seasonal fruits, or you could help yourself to a filling smoothie and fruit juices. "Besides timely delivery, we also ensure good taste since we believe that healthy food is meant to be tasty too," says De. Explaining their partnership with Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) certified kitchens where the food is prepared, he adds, "Hygiene and strict quality control are our biggest values that cannot be compromised." Launched just a few months back, The First Meal already has over 150 regular subscriptions per day with new clients getting added regularly. "More than the numbers, the best compliment for us is the value we add to our clients' health and lifestyle," says Subedi, adding that since breakfast is the most important meal of the day, "If we are able to get people to turn more disciplined about it, we would think our job done."

► **Price** Rs 300 onwards

► **At** thefirstmeal.in

Co-owners of The First Meal, (left to right) Saswata Shankar De, Suraj Prakash Subedi, Ravi Varma and Yuv Raj Poosarala



Danesh Sharma , owner, Poets and Oats



DHANESH SHARMA, 26, doesn't call himself a writer although sometimes his custom-baked vegan breads are sent out to the guests with a line or two scribbled spontaneously. "That's how the name Poets and Oats came about, when I was still baking from home before the café was launched a year ago. I never thought that I would call myself a baker one day," he says, recalling his short stint as a school teacher, before he turned full-time entrepreneur. Being vegan and health conscious, Sharma decided to start baking his own bread, almost on a whim, when he saw that many commercial brands claimed their breads were made from whole wheat but that was not strictly the case. "In complete activist mode, I began researching on home baking and came up with my recipes," he says. The result is delicious



and healthy breads like multigrain and oats with whole wheat, made with organic ingredients that are home-delivered. "At the café, the menu is rather dynamic, sometimes changing every week," he says, pointing to a white board that lists goodies like rice baguette sandwich made with rice flour and a Vietnamese-style filling. Gorge on their signature sandwich, Chip Butty, stuffed with baked potato wedges, olive oil, Italian herbs and served with harissa and pumpkin sauce. Also on offer are gluten-free rice noodles and palm jaggery sweetened coffee made from soy and coconut milk. "Eventually, we will add more items to the menu with the idea of making healthy food interesting and drawing from cuisines across the globe," says Sharma.

► **Price** for two Rs 500 ► **At** Goethe Zentrum, Road No 3, Banjara Hills; facebook.com/poetsandoats/

1# MAGICAL WEAVES

Designer Gaurang Shah's new collection, Kalpavriksha—Tree of life is a homage to the age-old craft of jamdani. Inspired by the tree of life philosophy, his creations are resplendent blends of Indian textiles and traditional weaving. Kantha of Bengal, Zardosi of Hyderabad, Kasuti of Hubli, Marodi of Rajasthan, Chikankari of Lucknow, Kashidakari of Kashmir, Bandhini from Kutch and Parsi Gara from Mumbai feature in his look book, translating into saris that are nothing short of works of art.

AT Gaurang, Road No 1, Jubilee Hills
TEL 23555089



2# NIGHT WOK

→ **ON ALL SATURDAYS**

At Syn, Saturday midnights are all about Chinese street noodles, Som tam from Bangkok, Japanese ramen and Singaporean Chili crab, besides a full menu of Asian street food.

PRICE Rs 850 all inclusive per person **AT** Syn, Taj Deccan, Erramanzil
TEL 66663939



3# PICTURE THIS

→ **MARCH 19 AND 20**

Learn the fundamentals of photography at the two-day workshop put together by Toehold Photography.
WEBSITE toehold.in

4# RETAIL THERAPY

→ MARCH 29 AND 30

Shopaholics or window shoppers—there's a little something for everyone at the Desire exhibition, with stalls ranging from designer saris to fancy lehengas, funky footwear and fun accessories. Perfect, we'd say, for the ongoing wedding season.

AT Taj Krishna, Road No 1, Banjara Hills

TEL 66662323



5# GLOW OF GOLD

Come mid-March and there'll be another excuse for you to spend big monies as Aqua Diamonds and Gold is set to launch its jewellery store in Hyderabad. Besides ethnic and designer jewellery, another section earmarked for connoisseurs is where the exquisite silver art will be.

AT Road No 3, Banjara Hills

6# FINE EASELS

→ ON TILL MARCH 20

Feast your eyes on some of the most profound works of artist Jogen Chowdhury at an exhibition titled, Calligraphy of Touch and Gaze.

AT Art Gallery, Upper Lobby, Trident TEL 66232323

7# ROYAL FARE

→ MARCH 11 TO 20

Find yourself transported to the old world charm of the havelis of Lucknow at the Jashn-e-Awadh food festival. It's pure indulgence from the word go, as you treat yourself to classics like Lucknowi biryani and Shami kebabs besides several lesser known delicacies inspired from the royal kitchens of Awadh. The music promises to be as ecstatic as the desserts.

AT Kabab-E-Bahar Taj Banjara, Road No 1, Banjara Hills TEL 66669999



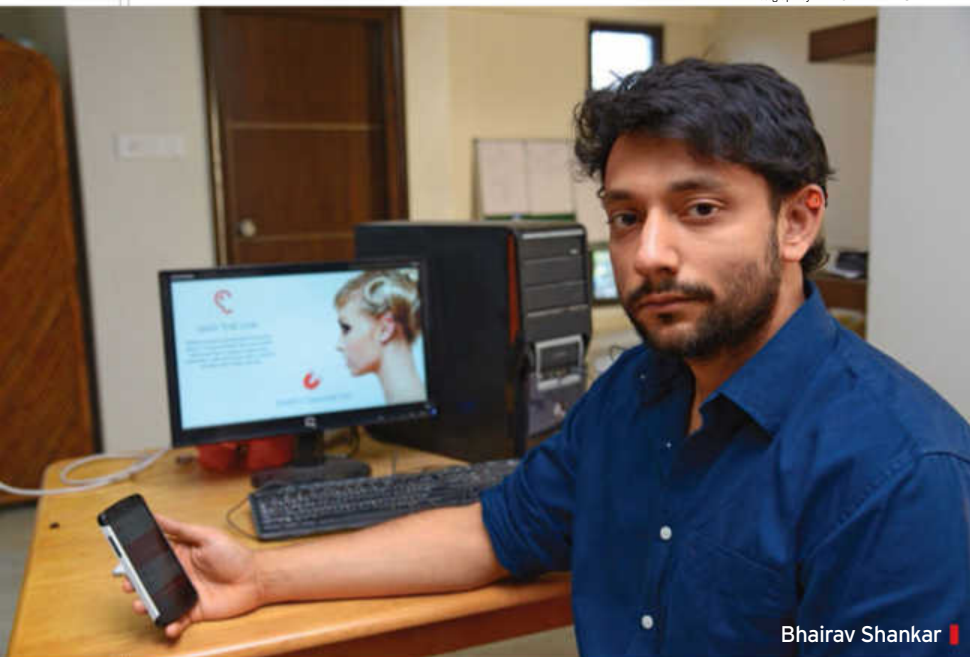
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Photograph by KRISHNENDU HALDER



HEART IN THE RIGHT PLACE

BHAIRAV SHANKAR'S CREATION, FLIP, OFFERS A SNAPSHOT OF VARIOUS ASPECTS OF YOUR HEALTH ON THE GO

By MONA RAMAVAT

Meet Bhairav Shankar, 27, and you know that there's an artist and scientist that creatively coexist in him. He is not just a theatre enthusiast, an aspiring novelist and a blogger, but also a techie. And that is the field he's looking to make a difference. Like his father, filmmaker Mani Shankar of *Tango Charlie* fame, his creative inclination is towards hologram technology too. In the campaign for the Gujarat elections of 2012, his contributions for the Modi holograms were immense and impressive.

His current passion though is what might just be the lightest wearable health monitor. "Wear Flip during a workout and it turns into a fitness monitor, or an emergency alert device for the elderly and simply a stress indicator for someone in a desk job," says Shankar, taking his invention off his ear. He calls this compact device Flip, which offers a quick snapshot of various

aspects of your health on the go. The first product brought out by his venture, Avantari Technologies, Flip was an abstract idea till a few years ago when Shankar was still a bio-medical student at Oxford University in 2012. "When we formed our small R&D unit, we were looking for a way to predict an emergency even before it occurs. So we looked at all the wearable heart rate monitors in the market, and realised that they are all getting heart rate from the wrong part of body," he says, tapping his wrist. After more than two years of research, they designed a product that gathered information about the heart from the ear, which is a far more reliable organ to extract heart rate information from because "Unlike the wrist, it doesn't attach itself to any moving parts of the body. Therefore, the result is clean, uninterrupted and accurate data," he explains.

This might be just what the doctor ordered for many who rely on wearable health monitors, especially

in the light of the recent class action lawsuit on Fitbit, which alleges that some of its wearable products cannot measure heart rate accurately, as advertised. A device like Flip can warn the onset of not just cardiac arrest but even alert the user on stress levels, making it a multifarious wearable health monitor. It also gives you information on your posture, respiration rate, calorie burn and much more. "Since it uses Bluetooth rather than GSM technology, it is safer than even a phone. You just wear it and tap for it for it to start working and it switches off on its own once you take it off. It's as easy as that," he says.

FORM-IV

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|--|--|
| 1. Place of publication | : New Delhi |
| 2. Periodicity of publication | : Monthly |
| 3. Printer's name | : Ashish Kumar Bagga |
| Nationality | : Indian |
| Address | : Ashirwad, A 4/2, DLF City, Phase I, Gurgaon-122 002 |
| 4. Publisher's name | : Ashish Kumar Bagga |
| Nationality | : Indian |
| Address | : Ashirwad, A 4/2, DLF City, Phase I, Gurgaon-122 002 |
| 5. Editor's name | : Kaveree Bamzai |
| Nationality | : Indian |
| Address | : B-3/14, Vasant Vihar, New Delhi-110 057. |
| 6. Names and addresses of individuals who own the newspaper and partners or shareholders holding more than one per cent of the total capital | : Owner: M/s Living Media India Limited, K-9, Connaught Circus, New Delhi-110 001. |

Shareholders holding more than one per cent of the total capital of the owner company:

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Dt: 01.03.16

INDIA
TODAY

A MONTHLY CITY MAGAZINE

SIMPLY KOLKATA



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DIRECTOR, EMAMI
CHISEL ART GALLERY

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Photograph by SUBIR HALDER

COVER STORY

What A Woman

s-4

Seven women changemakers from the city.

Cover photo by SUBIR HALDER
Location courtesy THE OBEROI GRAND

OUR PICK of the month

Art Treat

Till March 31

Check out ECA Annual, Emami Chisel Art's annual show with works of 95 emerging artists along with that of contemporary greats like Jogen Chowdhury, Shuvaprasanna, Lalu Prosad Shaw, Jayashree Chakraborty, Ganesh Haloi, Suhas Roy, Sanat Kar, Shipra Bhattacharya, Rabin Mondal, Bipin Goswami, Prabir Gupta, Ramananda Bandyopadhyay and more.

More than 1100 paintings, sculptures, drawings, printmaking, new media photography and installation art works

from across the country are a part of the collection.

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Want to tell us about an event? A new store? A restaurant? People doing interesting things? Anything newsworthy? Please email us at: simplykolkata@intoday.com

09:41



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A FEW GOOD WOMEN

HEPTATHLETE, SONGSTRESS, ACTOR
WITH A HEART, THESE THREE AND
MORE DO KOLKATA PROUD

By **MALINI BANERJEE**

Photographs by SUBIR HALDER

Swapna Barman,
athlete



SWAPNA BARMAN, 19, ATHLETE
ON HER
TOES

S

WAPNA BARMAN, 19, IS desperately homesick. Though just back from her hometown, Jalpaigudi, she still misses everything about home—her parents, her elder brother and his wife, her elder sister and her two-year old nephew. Training as a heptathlete can be a lonesome job.

Barman didn't start out wanting to be a heptathlete, which means she has to compete in a seven part race that includes 100 m hurdles, high jump, shot-put, 200 m sprint, long jump, javelin, and another 800 m race. She wanted to be a footballer. "Messing around in school sport in Jalpaigudi," was how she discovered her knack for high jumps. Coach Subhash Sarkar wasn't easily convinced. "She had a broader, shorter frame not ideal for high jumps. But later, I was impressed by her performance in an all India meet at Ludhiana for under-14 girls," says Sarkar. For a diminutive 160 cm frame, that's a quite a feat. "I started training her in March 2013 and by May she had come second in a junior federation match," he says.

But Barman is held back by her own body. Born with six toes on each foot, it gets painful for her to run in regular shoes. "New shoes always hurt. They take long to wear in so that they can accommodate my toes, but it also means they don't last too long," says Barman. Since each event requires a different kind of footwear, her shoe budget alone crosses Rs 1 lakh a year. "I never thought they could be an impediment. It just is the way it is," she says.

Busy preparing for Doha Asian Indoor Championship, now her coach rues that the only thing holding Barman back is her speed and endurance. Both of which would get a boost with running gear that's customised for her feet. "If her endurance improves, then we will see its effects in the 800 m race and speed will affect everything from long jump to javelin," says Sarkar.

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KAUSHIKY CHAKRABORTY, 35, CLASSICAL VOCALIST
SONGBIRD

ONE MUST HAVE WON A LOT OF AWARDS FOR them to not matter anymore. Or if they matter, they matter little. "Awards do make one feel special. But the next day, you are back to being who you are," says classical vocalist, Kaushiky Chakraborty.

This songstress measures her achievements through moments. Like opening for a Zakir Hussain concert in Delhi when she was just 16. Or performing in Mumbai in 2014, when the tabla maestro made an exception to come to watch her perform. Her musical group, Sakhi, comprises Shaoni Talwalkar on the tabla, Mahima Upadhyay on the *pakhwaj*, Debopriya Chatterjee on flute, Nandini Shankar on the violin, Kathak by Bhakti Deshpande along with her vocals. "Within a year of forming, we were invited to perform in Carnegie Hall, USA," she exclaims. However, a memory that is still fresh with her is when Lata Mangeshkar complimented her on her rendition of a Marathi *abhang*. "I though I was hallucinating. I had tears in my eyes," says the elated singer.

Location courtesy THE OBEROI GRAND

Kaushiky
Chakraborty,
classical vocalist



Amrita
Kajaria, director,
Jutify

AMRITA KAJARIA, 28, DIRECTOR, JUTIFY
**BAG
IT**

AMRITA KAJARIA DOESN'T CALL HERSELF a feminist. And yet the promoter and director of Jutify, a company that manufactures jute products, employs a workforce that is sixty per-cent women from underprivileged backgrounds. "We trained them, convinced families to let them work, provided a system of transportation and ensured a crèche so they would have a place to keep their children in," says the marketing and finance graduate from University of Southern California, USA.

Within a year of its opening, Jutify has managed a turnover of Rs 5 crore, manufacturing 8,000 shopping bags a month. While most of them are exported to markets in the USA and Europe, they will be available in the country soon too. "Just a simple solution like carrying your own bag can make a difference to the environment. In our country, plastics may be banned and many are beginning to charge for plastic bags but the average vegetable seller and the consumer take it for granted," says Kajaria.

LATA HARLALKA, 64, FOUNDER, PALKI

**OLD
WORLD
CHARM**

WHEN SHE STARTED PALKI IN 1998, Lata Harlalka faced criticism from her peers. “You can’t run a business this way,” they told her. “But I was adamant. I wanted to do something on my own. And I figured that even if this was a failed venture, at least I could use the clothes in my daughter’s trousseau,” she says. Palki, her brand, began with two *karigars* and was run from Lata’s own bedroom.

Palki’s calling card became its ‘fusion wear’ saris. One can see the amalgamation of different weaves in one sari like Benarasi and Bandhej together. “Our biggest mover is the bridal wear that is priced between Rs 30,000 and Rs 50,000,” says Anwasha, Harlalka’s daughter-in-law who joined the business in 2002.

Harlalka claims to not be driven by money. “For us the relationships are more important. I would rather my clients be sure of investing their time and money in our clothes, than regret it after ordering. There have been times when I have resisted taking orders as I felt it may be taking a premature decision..,” says the matriarch behind the 17-year-old brand.

Lata Harlalka,
founder, Palki



Location courtesy THE OBEROI GRAND

Richa Agarwal, Director,
Emami Chisel Art
Gallery

RICHA AGARWAL, 37, DIRECTOR, EMAMI CHISEL ART

**ART
STRUCK**

MARRIED AT 19, THE ONLY EXPOSURE TO art Richa Agarwal had as a young girl was making Tanjore paintings in school. It was after she married and was shopping for a gift for her father-in-law, that she first understood the importance of art. “We wanted to give him a Bratin Khan painting. And it was only then I realised that art could be a luxury product,” she laughs. Now, nearly seven years as the director of Emami Chisel Art Gallery (ECA) has her rattling off the names of contemporary artists with elan. ECA focuses on providing young and emerging artists a platform. Her annual show and art fair both make room for upcoming talent.

For Agarwal, each humble exhibition is important. “To me, a small art walk is as important as big exhibitions. It’s through events like these that we build a sensibility for art,” she says.





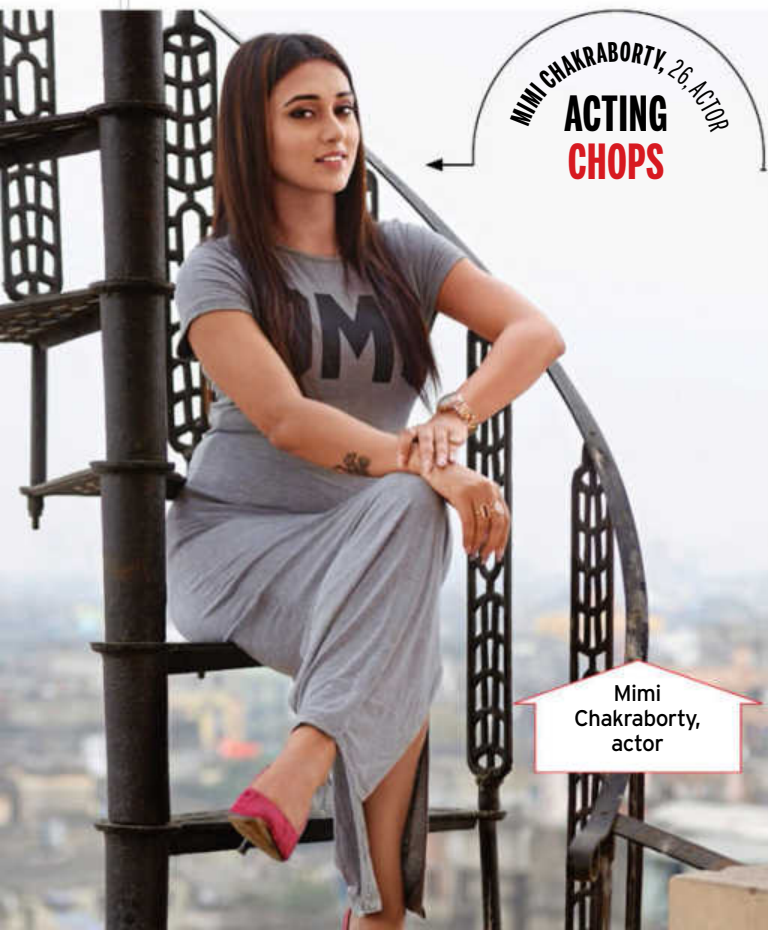
IT WAS WHILE PURSUING HER PHD IN CELL biology at the University of Virginia, USA that Madhura Lohia woke up to the need of finding natural solutions to common physical ailments. A bad case of fungal infection that kept recurring even after being treated by a strong dose of allopathic medicine, had her researching for a natural solution. “I was a scientist first. I couldn’t just use commonly known natural solutions. It had to be scientifically proven,” she says. But a little bit of research on the Internet proved that coconut oil with essential oils like cedarwood oil and lavender could help. It was also during the same time that the harmful effects of chemicals dawned on her. “The thought that something one uses for vanity could affect the very thing one was so vain about, really disturbed me,” she said.

Her brand ideology for Kalpatree Naturals and Organic Mandi arose from this philosophy. While Kalpatree Naturals is about organic cold pressed oils, balms and lotions, Organic Mandi provides fresh organic produce like vegetables and fruits as well as products



like honey, ghee and nolen gur.

With farmers markets and organic pop-up shops happening year round and thrice-a-week deliveries, Lohia’s plate is quite full. She isn’t quite ready to give up her labs and experiments yet. “My dream is to add a small R&D unit that will prove all these home remedies through science and make easy-to-use products from them,” she says.



THE DOE-EYED TOLLYWOOD ACTOR WAS going back home after a long day of shoots when she saw a car hit a bike and speed away, leaving the man bleeding and grievously injured. She followed them, asked her security team to apprehend them and later handed them over to the police. But she makes no bones about being a Good Samaritan and attributes it to her small town roots. “I grew up in a small town in Bengal in Jalpaigudi. We always had that attitude of helping people if we saw them in trouble,” she says.

Mimi’s claim to fame was playing Pupe in Rituparno Ghosh’s *Ganer Oparay*, a hit television show that revolved around Tagore’s songs. The actor had just missed going to finals of the Miss India’s pageant when the call came for a look test for the show. “Ritu *da* saw me and said this is my Pupe,” says Chakraborty. One would assume the rest to be history except for the minor problem of Mimi’s inability to read Bengali. “Ritu *da* would record the dialogues for me on tape and I would memorise them. Since the series was on Tagore, the sentences were long and verbose,” she says.

But she’s come far from those days and is busy with promotions of the just released *Ki Koray Tokay Bolbo*. “I can now read the script in Bengali,” exclaims the actor.

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WHAT A BLAST!

WEST BENGAL MINISTER FOR TOURISM AND PLAY-WRIGHT BRATYA BASU SPEAKS TO SIMPLY KOLKATA ON HIS NEW PLAY, *BOMA*

Bratya Basu

Photograph by SUBIR HALDER

Q. What made you take up Sri Aurobindo's life for a play?

Boma is a deconstruction and an intimate observation of a revolutionary. There are two aspects to a revolutionary—who the state calls revolutionary or a terrorist. Another thing is that when we talk about our past, our tendency is to glorify it.

In this saga I have kept it absolutely objective. Nobody is beyond the truth. There was no intent to glorify and Aurobindo is not the main focus of the play. This is more about the interrelation between the Jugantar Samiti and all the hard-core revolutionaries.

Though it is their inner conflicts and those of the Bengali middle class that come to the surface—which are relevant even today. For me it was a way of studying the past to understand our present.

Q. But why this trial?
But why not, is my question. One can take anything from the past to understand one's present. From this era or the medieval era, anything really.

Q. Your plays have always had political consciousness. Does being in politics help or provide an advantage while directing plays with political relevance?

When I did *17 July* in 2004, I wasn't in politics. I did *Winkle Twinkle* even

before that in 2002. I wasn't even part of politics in college. I became politically active during the Singur and Nandigram movement in 2006. At that point of time the then intelligentsia was wondering whether to join politics or not and I was one of the first to say that it wouldn't be just enough to protest but also to come out in support of the alternative party. I was nominated by our now Chief Minister, Mamata Banerjee in 2011 and I contested assembly elections and won. That was the start of my entry into legislative politics. I do use theatrical metaphors to understand present

situations around me.

Q. Your adaptation of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* was set in Mumbai. Why not Kolkata?

Twelfth Night's Illyria is a city of carnival. And Mumbai provides a stage for a lot of things—underworld cricket, betting, Bollywood and beggars. Mumbai is carnivalesque. It's happening. The flipside of it is the oppression.

Q. Are you saying Kolkata is tragic? Considering you set one of the greatest known tragedies here...

(laughs) Well one can't deny Kolkata is rather serious and is for serious plays. So *Hamlet* is set here. *Boma* is obviously set here. Mumbai is something I would choose for fun and lightheartedness.

In Conversation

BRATYA BASU

Q. What are your next ventures?

The play I am planning next revolves around famous Bengali playwright Ashim Chakraborty who was treated like an outcast after his play *Barbodhu*. As for films, I have had to turn down over five films recently. But I am considering Golam Mostafa Farooki's next film.

Q. As the tourism minister of Bengal what are your five favourite tourist spots in Bengal?

Mongpong in Dooars, Sajnekhali in Sunderbans, Gorumara in Dooars, Lava in Kalimpong and Takda, Darjeeling.

■ By Malini Banerjee

FORM-IV

- Place of publication : New Delhi
- Periodicity of publication : Monthly
- Printer's name : Ashish Kumar Bagga
Nationality : Indian
Address : Ashirwad, A 4/2, DLF City, Phase I, Gurgaon-122 002
- Publisher's name : Ashish Kumar Bagga
Nationality : Indian
Address : Ashirwad, A 4/2, DLF City, Phase I, Gurgaon-122 002
- Editor's name : Kaveree Bamzai
Nationality : Indian
Address : B-3/14, Vasant Vihar, New Delhi-110 057.
- Names and addresses of individuals who own the newspaper and partners or shareholders holding more than one per cent of the total capital : Owner: M/s Living Media India Limited, K-9, Connaught Circus, New Delhi-110 001.

Shareholders holding more than one per cent of the total capital of the owner company:

- Mr. Aroon Purie, 6, Palam Marg, Vasant Vihar, New Delhi-110 057.
- Mrs. Rekha Purie, 6, Palam Marg, Vasant Vihar, New Delhi-110 057.
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- The All India Investment Corporation Private Limited, K-9, Connaught Circus, New Delhi-110 001.
- World Media Private Limited, K-9, Connaught Circus, New Delhi-110 001.
- IGH Holdings Private Limited, 1st Floor, Industry House, 159 Churchgate Reclamation, Mumbai- 400 020.

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Ashish Kumar Bagga
Signature of publisher

Dt: 01.03.16